Anfield matchday album + Alberto Moreno exclusive interview + Academy update + Ice Bucket Challenge Reds!

LIVERPOOL FC

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official liverpool fc monthly magazine

"IT'S GOING TO BE NICE"

MARIO BALOTELLI
Liverpool FC striker

Fara Williams
Liverpool lioness

Philippe Coutinho
Midfield maestro

Ronnie Moran
Anfield legend





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Issue 26 October 2014





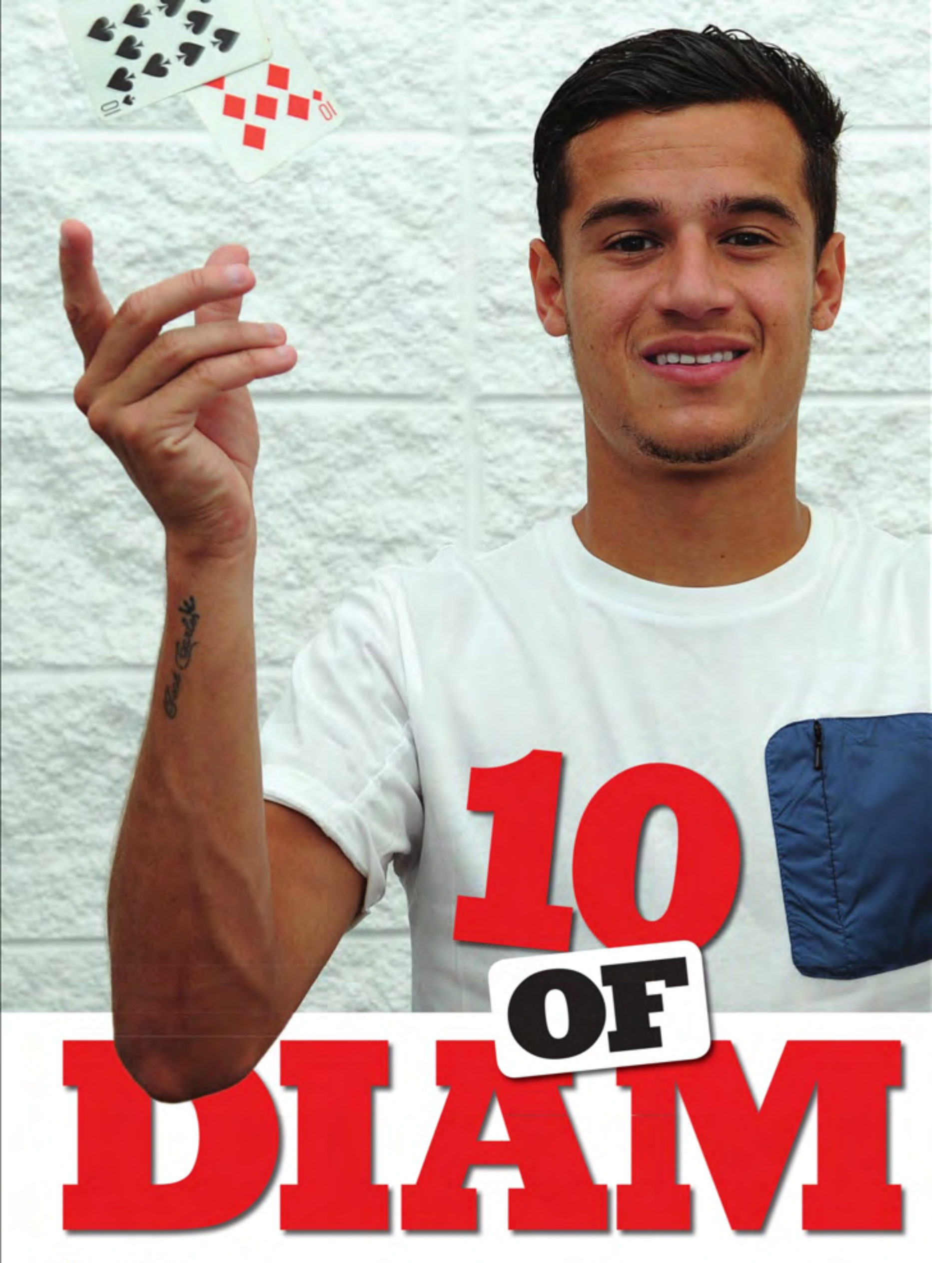






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10
OF
DIAM

Midfield magician Philippe Coutinho celebrates his return to the Brazil squad and shares his Liverpool FC dreams with William Hughes

Late last year Daniel Sturridge compared Philippe Coutinho to the American magician David Blaine. A box of tricks, the Brazilian's midfield mastery during his first full season at Anfield saw him become established as one of the aces in Brendan Rodgers' pack.

With seven Premier League assists, the no10 was a key creative pivot demonstrating the vision to spot the forward runs of Sturridge and company. In pre-season's home friendly against Borussia Dortmund his sublime throughball set the England striker racing in on goal to score again.

"Sometimes these things just happen," says Philippe. "I wouldn't say I am always thinking two or three passes ahead but there are occasions when you see the opportunity: you spot the player and pick him out.

"In my position I always want to produce the best passes and create the best chances – you look and try to see where the opportunities are."

A big part of Coutinho's vision in the short, medium and long term is finding success with club and country. While he admits that he was never expecting to be a part of Brazil's squad for the home World Cup finals this summer, a combination of his own early-season form and his nation's semi-final capitulation to Germany has now brought him an international recall. Former defensive midfielder Dunga was restored to the role of national-team manager in July almost four years to the day that he left the post.

Reflecting on Brazil's 7-1 dismantling by Germany in Belo Horizonte, the Rio-born schemer says: "The semi-final was very unfortunate but games like that can happen. Now the squad has to look forward. I am really, really

ONDS

On the ball at the Etihad recently

happy about being selected now for the squad and I hope to be able to show the quality of my work for the team in this new era.

"I did not have a chance to talk to Dunga before the squad was named but I am looking forward to joining up with them and would love to be a big part of it for the future."

Coutinho makes no secret of his ambition to play in a World Cup but says it's a case of learning to walk before he runs. First up were friendlies against Colombia in Miami and Ecuador in New Jersey at the start of September. He knows that a continued presence in the Samba squad will depend on his ability to maintain a level of consistency in the red shirt of Liverpool. If he can do that throughout this campaign, his reward may be a place in the squad for the Copa America in Chile next summer.

"Of course building towards that tournament and beyond is important, but we have to think in terms of one step at a time," he says. "This is a great opportunity for me but I also have to concentrate on my work here at Liverpool. It's a case of taking things slowly, but of course I would love to be involved with the squad."

Coutinho's only senior cap to date came in October 2010 when, as an 18-year-old, he was selected by Mano Menezes to start a 3-0 friendly victory against Iran. His recall to the squad was widely lauded with those backing Dunga's decision including another midfield artist whose skills left defences spellbound: Eighties master Zico.

"That was very nice for me to hear," says Coutinho. "He is one of the

"Being called up by Brazil is great but I have to focus on my job here"

greatest number 10s ever isn't he? It was a great honour for me to receive such comments as those from him. For me, it is a great motivating factor to carry on improving."

Another stimulus is LFC's second-placed finish in the Premier League last season. Coutinho confesses it was a campaign of paradoxes: on the one hand he was establishing himself as a first-team regular in a team that scored more than 100 league goals; on the other was a lingering feeling of what might have been as the prospect of the club's first title in 24 years disappeared in the final fours hours of football.

"In the end it was difficult for us because we were very close to winning the title. But overall we have to look back and say it was a good season. Nobody outside the club expected us to be challengers and we still managed to secure a place in the Champions League. It was important for everybody, not just me, to achieve that. We have to think of last season as a base but also as an inspiration. We have to build on it so that we reach those same levels and more. Hopefully we can use it as a catalyst for success.

"The team's crowning ambition is to win the championship. We nearly reached that target last season and so we definitely want to make sure that we attain it this season."

Helping him towards that objective are several new faces. The shake-up to the playing staff had seen nine new arrivals at Melwood heading into the final few days of the transfer window.

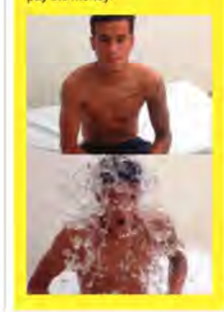
"It's exciting times because a number of great players have arrived to help the team. In the attacking midfield positions we have added Lazar Markovic and Adam Lallana who have shown great quality in training and I'm sure they will be important players for the club in the years ahead.

"I actually played against Lazar in a Europa League game a couple of years ago when I was at Inter and he was with Partizan Belgrade. He would only have been 18 but even then I could already see that he was a player with great quality and I am convinced that he will help our team an awful lot.

"Of course it's not just those two players. We have brought in some excellent quality in all areas of the team so we feel we are well equipped to do well again this season."

MORE ICE?

Philippe was nominated to undertake the Ice Bucket Challenge by Cardiff City's Brazilian defender Fabio. The challenge was created by the ALS Association, working to fight Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis – also known as Motor Neurone Disease in the UK. "It was a great shock when I felt the ice and very, very cold but it was all for a good cause," he says. "One of my three nominations was Lucas and he accepted it. I also nominated Souza, who I played with at Vasco da Gama and is now at Sao Paulo, and Juan Jesus who plays for Inter. I don't think either of them did it within 24 hours so they will have to pay the money!"



Exclusive photography by John Powell


WARRIOR
Garuda Indonesia


COUTINHO
10
28

Philippe has been a former team-mate of another new signing, Mario Balotelli, but only for seven days! "I only practised and trained with him for one week at Inter in the pre-season of 2010 because he was on his way out to join Manchester City just as I was on my way in from Vasco. He is a great player who scores loads of goals and could be an important part of the team. The club has decided to bring him into the squad and I am looking forward to playing alongside him."

In terms of personal progress Coutinho believes another 12 months working with Brendan Rodgers and his coaching staff will aid the evolution of his game. "I've been here 18 months and become more familiar with his methods. It's great because the manager here gives the players a lot of freedom. I believe it's very important for footballers to feel that they have a freedom of movement to play their own games and express themselves.

"I always want to strive for improvement on the pitch. I want to give my best on the field and try to get better every time I go out there."

One area where he accepts he must start showing a greater return is his goalscoring contribution. It may seem odd to highlight this in so free-flowing a team, but Coutinho went into the new campaign with a record of eight goals from 50 appearances for Liverpool and believes he can better last season's tally of five. "It's part of my game that I definitely want to improve on and I believe I can. In each training practice that is on my mind."

The early signs are good – that friendly against Dortmund brought the Brazilian a goal in front of the Kop as he wrapped up a convincing 4-0 victory. The Reds built on that success by beginning their new league campaign seven days later with a hard-fought defeat of Southampton.

"It was a big match for us and it was very important to get those first three points on the board. We saw last season against Stoke what a big difference it can make by getting off to a winning start. Now the team wants to improve throughout the season."

This month will see the start of the Reds' first UEFA Champions League campaign for five years and Coutinho is excited at the prospect of rubbing shoulders with some of the game's modern greats in club competition. He has had previous tastes of the tournament during his time in Italy and says it is the place to be.

"I am excited about it because it is probably the greatest club tournament in the world. It will be good to be a part of again and we will try to do as well as we can but we also have to be mindful of what we aim to achieve in the Premier League and not forget that.

"Playing in the Champions League with Inter Milan was great for me at the time. As a young player who had only seen the tournament on TV before, I was living a dream when I was playing in those games. Now I want that feeling to carry on and I'm determined to enjoy it as much as possible."



Four of a kind!

"It's great that the boss gives us the freedom to express ourselves"

You get the feeling that Philippe has found the perfect platform to enjoy his football at Liverpool. He speaks, as he plays, like one beyond his years. It is hard to believe that on the day Brazil kicked off their World Cup campaign with a 3-1 win against Croatia in Sao Paulo, he was celebrating only his 22nd birthday. He hopes to be spending his 26th in Russia with the Brazilian World Cup squad. If he achieves that, the man playing many of Liverpool's creative cards will no doubt have produced plenty for Kopites to savour between times – starting with the current campaign. "I do feel confident going into the season but the most important thing is that, as a group, the team feels ready. We had a good pre-season but now we have to focus on the work ahead.

"It is a young squad and we all want to help the club move forward. It is another important season for all of us but we are excited by what lies ahead."

ZICO ON COUTINHO

"He's a very skilled and tactical player. He has already played in a number of countries, which must have been a good learning experience for him as he has achieved a higher level of confidence now at Liverpool. This confidence has probably come from the manager and his team-mates, and is something our players need when playing abroad. He's improved his performances as a result and you can see [last season] he was being more audacious in trying new moves and taking higher risks. For me, that development was important for Liverpool to have the attacking quality we saw last season. You have to be a regular performer to win a place with the national team, not just play well in a single season. He is on the right track."




L.F.C.

Mario Balotelli tells James Carroll from the club's official website why joining Liverpool FC was an easy decision

Mario fantastico Mario magnifico

Mario, welcome to Liverpool Football Club. How do you feel to have signed for the club?
I'm very happy. We've been talking about coming here and I'm happy to be here.

What attracted you to the challenge here at Liverpool?
Liverpool are one of the best teams in England. The football is very good here. It's a great team with young players, and that's why I came here.

You've received an incredible reception from the fans here already. How has that made you feel?
I didn't expect it because I've always been playing against Liverpool. Whenever I played against Liverpool, the fans weren't nice with me but that's normal – it's football! Now that I play for Liverpool, I can see the expectation in people. They're very happy and that makes me very happy at the same time.

"I can see the expectation in the fans – they're happy and so am I"

You've previously described playing at Anfield as a 'beautiful experience' to Fabio Borini – did you enjoy playing at Anfield as an opposing player?
No – but when I play with this team [at Anfield] it's going to be nice for sure. To play here for Liverpool excites me, but if you're an opponent it's difficult.

For someone still so young you have a lot of experience – can you use that to help what is a young team here?
I maybe have a little bit more experience than other players – if I can help them, I'm happy to help them.

Liverpool are back in the Champions League. You were Inter's youngest-ever scorer in the tournament and also won it with them in 2010. Will those experiences help Liverpool this season?



LFC v Milan on the summer tour

Training at Melwood

"I want to win another Champions League – I want to do it with Liverpool"

I always start a competition wanting to win it. We will see. I want to win another Champions League for sure, because the Champions League wasn't all mine, I was in a team. I want to take this team to the Champions League.

You have been away from English football for around 18 months – how do you feel about coming back?
I'm happy to be back because I left England and it was a mistake. I wanted to go to Italy but I realised it was a mistake.

Do you feel English football suits you better?
English football is generally better. English football is beautiful.

You've taken the no45 shirt – can you explain its significance?
When I first played three or four games with Inter Milan, when I was young, I had no45 because the numbers for young players were from no36 to no50. I took 45 because I was joking that four plus five is nine – and I scored in all four games. It brings me luck and that's why I've always kept no45.

Finally, what are your ambitions here at Liverpool? What do you hope to achieve?
As much as I can.

Playing for Manchester City at Anfield in August 2012



WHAT THEY SAY

Brendan Rodgers: "He's got that self-belief and football arrogance when he's on the field. All of the big teams and best teams have that. Hopefully he can contribute to what we are doing. We know that he is a football talent and he knows that he's very much part of a team. There are no big egos – this is a group that has been successful, improved and got to the Champions League because they are a team. He knows he needs to fit into that."

Jordan Henderson: "I think everyone is happy and looking forward to playing with him because he is a talented player and a very big player. Hopefully he can come into the squad and gel straight away and give us a big lift."

Ian Rush: "When Suarez was playing with Sturridge, they interacted and read the game together. Balotelli and Sturridge will do that. He's had so many clubs so early but I think now he is learning to mature. He has been given a fantastic chance and the supporters will give him every chance."

John Aldridge: "He provides another option and we've got a lot of games this season, so Brendan has plenty of options now. He could be phenomenal and he's the type who will be endearing to the fans."

Joe Allen: "I'm excited to work with him. He's a player with massive quality. He has that spontaneous edge to him. He's going to give us a massive threat."








PICK THAT ONE OUT

Mario Balotelli rescued the season for one of Italy's footballing giants, writes Sheridan Bird

To score a goal like that takes work in training. I practise these shots. God gave me talent – but I work hard."

This was Mario Balotelli's reaction to his 86th-minute winner for AC Milan against Bologna in February 2014. By then, saving the Rossoneri had become a pleasing habit.

That dipping long-distance rocket with little back-lift, which flew over visiting goalkeeper Gianluca Curci, was a distillation of Balo's skill and fearsome power. His transfer to Milan from Manchester City in January 2013 had given everyone a boost. "The day he signed we sold 30,000 more copies than normal," recalls *Gazzetta dello Sport* columnist Luigi Garlando.

Milan were 12th in Serie A after 13 matches in 2012/13 and facing a humiliating season. When Balotelli joined a few weeks later they were still outside the main places for European qualification. The new boy made an instant impact and finished the season with 12 league







goals in 13 matches. Shrugging off their wretched start, the seven-times European champions clinched third and a place in the Champions League. "Balotelli was so important," says writer Massimiliano Cristina from the Italian website SportMediaset. "He carried Milan to European qualification. He was the star – without his goals the team wouldn't have made the top half of the table."

After Mario's first year in black-and-red, club director Adriano Galliani said: "Balo is a great player. He's scored 26 goals in a year for us – that's not an insignificant amount, especially considering we were the first club to make him a regular starter in the XI. In England he played in bursts."

The good vibes of spring 2013 filtered through to the player's international form. Italy were impressive at the 2013 Confederations Cup, the dress-rehearsal for the World Cup finals in Brazil. Cesare Prandelli's team, a mix of veterans in the defence and exciting youth in creative areas,

Frame by frame: the goal against Bologna

REDS & BLUES: LFC'S OTHER ITALIANS



Fabio Borini joined Liverpool from AS Roma in June 2012 to become Brendan Rodgers' first signing as Liverpool manager. The striker scored two goals in 20 appearances in his first season in a red shirt – against FC Gomel at Anfield in the UEFA Europa League and at Newcastle United in the Barclays Premier League – before spending the 2013/14 season on loan at Sunderland where his seven league goals played a key role in helping the club to avoid relegation.

Another recruit from AS Roma, midfielder Alberto Aquilani was signed by Rafael Benitez in August 2009 following the departure of Xabi Alonso to Real Madrid. Injuries restricted Aquilani to 28 appearances for the Reds, in which he scored two goals – against Portsmouth at Anfield and at home to Atletico Madrid in the UEFA Europea League semi-final – and provided six assists. He was sold to Fiorentina in 2012 after spending consecutive seasons on loan at Juventus and AC Milan.





Andrea Dossena signed for Liverpool from Udinese in July 2008 for a fee of £7million to replace the Roma-bound John Arne Riise. The left-back made 31 appearances in a Liverpool shirt and scored two memorable goals for the club in victories against Real Madrid and Manchester United in March 2009 – the former from close range after coming on as a late substitute at Anfield, the latter an inch-perfect lob at Old Trafford in the famous 4-1 victory. After a return to Italy with Napoli he was released by Sunderland at the end of last season.

6ft 4in goalkeeper Daniele Padelli became the first Italian to play for Liverpool when he joined from Sampdoria on a half-season loan in January 2007. Padelli's sole appearance in his brief stint at the club came in a 2-2 draw against Charlton Athletic in the final league game of the 2006/07 season. There followed further loans at Pisa, Avellino and Bari before he joined Udinese then Torino, for whom he played in every Serie A match last season as the team finished seventh in the table.



"In his second season with Milan he wasn't getting the killer pass"

plundered eight goals in their first three games. Balotelli scored two, but when injury forced him out of the semi-final against Spain the team lost its cutting edge.

During that competition Mario looked lean and motivated, often perched on the halfway line waiting for the ball. His strength and explosive speed from a standstill terrified his markers. Playing a high line against an on-song Balotelli has always been bad for the nerves. When he's pacing around the centre-circle, defenders are so worried about his ability to latch on to through balls and thunder towards goal that they leave space for others.

Back at the San Siro, his second season became increasingly problematic. The team's poor form cost coach Massimiliano Allegri his job. Although replacement Clarence Seedorf improved spirits, he didn't secure a European berth. Balotelli was still a protagonist, scoring in three of Seedorf's first five matches, but many felt the side lacked confidence and the quality to feed their centre-forward.

Gazzetta dello Sport journalist Stefano Cantalupi says: "He was dropping into midfield more often, instead of attacking the spaces around the other side's goal. But at Milan he didn't have many team-mates to provide him with 'killer' passes." SuperMario ended 2013/14 with 14 league goals and 18 in all competitions. Italy's struggles at the World Cup were well-documented, but Balotelli's headed winner against England typified his aerial threat. His goal sealed Italy's only win of the tournament.

Tall stories bury the footballing facts about the Sicily-born star. His strength to hold up the ball and presence of mind to pass into space created Sergio Aguero's title-winning goal for Manchester City in 2012. Balotelli has a wonderful touch and the iron physique to withstand batterings from Premier League centre-backs. He's quick and content to play with his back to goal when necessary.

The truth is that Mario did well for Milan under arduous conditions. It was a difficult time for the Rossoneri, yet the striker was their leading light and one-man rescue act. What Brendan Rodgers and Liverpool fans want to see is how well Balo can do in a happy, harmonious environment. Opponents are trying not to think too much about it.

European football writer Sheridan Bird contributes to Mirror Online, FA and UEFA publications and is the co-author of the award-winning book Football Type.



Celebrating his goal v England in Manaus

COVER STAR



Vanity Fair July 2012



Time November 2012



Sports Illustrated August 2013



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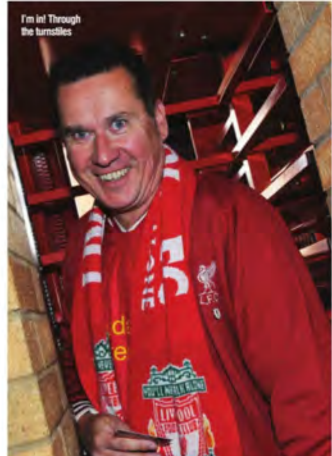
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GOING THE GAME

Photographer Nick Taylor captures the essence of a typical Liverpool FC matchday at Anfield


I'm in! Through the turnstiles


Coaches parked on Utting Avenue near Anfield Road


Getting with the programme


Pre-match warm-up



Time to head in



Badges of honour



Hat, cap or a scarf...



Bite to eat

YNWA

Chequered flag

Fifth element

Do not disturb



The gaffers

Must-read moment

Boot Room beverage

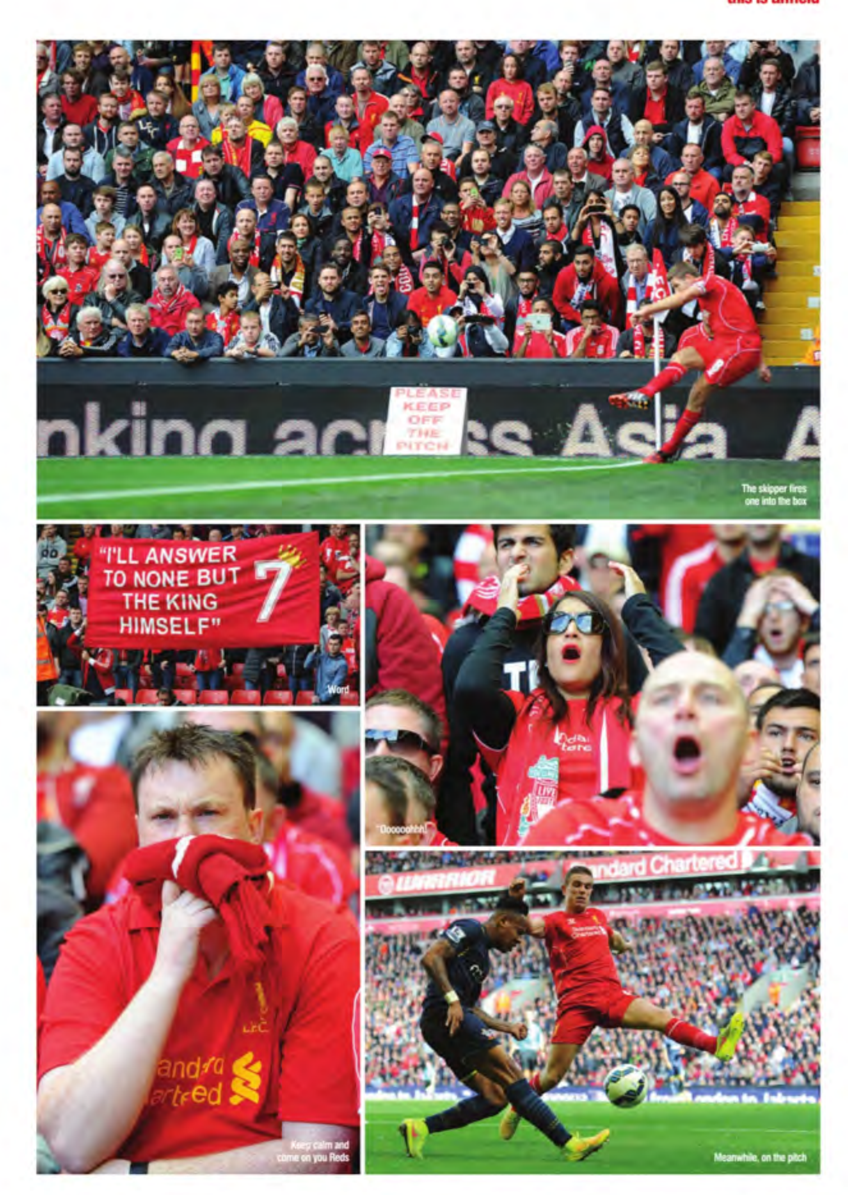
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Out come the teams



A study in group concentration


LIVERPOOL FC
FOOTBALL STAR
CHAMPIONS LEAGUE
LIVERPOOL
KINGS OF EUROPE
ESPAÑA



The skipper fires one into the box

Word

"Ooooohhh!"

Keep calm and come on you Reds

Meanwhile, on the pitch



It's tense

Foul throw!

An audience engrossed

Bob's flag



Yeeeeessssssssss!!!



Boss patrols the touchline

Get in!

Stewards prepare for the final whistle

One happy lad

Never in doubt

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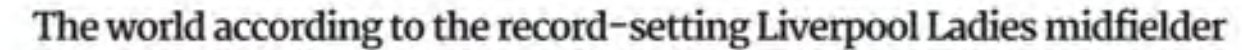


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The world according to the record-setting Liverpool Ladies midfielder

FARA

Fara Williams is England's most-capped player of all time. Against Sweden at the start of last month the Liverpool Ladies midfielder made her 130th appearance, beating Rachel Yankey's record, then helped the Three Lionesses book their place at next year's World Cup finals in Canada...

Reaching 130 caps is massive for me.

It is one that hasn't sunk in and probably won't until I retire which hopefully isn't going to be just yet! As long as I keep fit and playing well here at Liverpool and Mark [Sampson, England manager] is happy to select me then I'm happy to continue. Then hopefully Mark will have me in contention for one of the midfield spots for the World Cup in Canada next year.

It's great to be part of the new England set-up.

What Mark and Marieanne [Spacey, assistant manager] have brought is a sense of excitement about what we can achieve. When you look at how his teams are set up, it's changed and that is credit to him. He picks different personnel depending on the opposition, and I think when you've got a manager and a squad of players who are able to adapt to different situations, we've got good things coming for us.

The Sweden game last month was special not only for my 130th cap but also for the performance against a team such as Sweden that I don't ever remember beating and certainly not by that scoreline, 4-0. For me, it showed how far the team has come.

At the Euros in 2011 I thought we had a good balance between youth and experience but maybe the team wasn't quite ready then. They've had three years to push on and now we have plenty of talented young players and more competition for most positions. Hope Powell did a fantastic job but probably didn't feel there were enough players to put pressure on those being picked. Now Mark has a bigger pool of talent to select from. As players, we are regularly checking over our shoulders knowing there is somebody there ready to take our spot.

I made my England debut aged 17.

It was under Hope Powell in 2001. I came on as a substitute in a match away to Portugal. Hope was my manager for all my England senior career until Mark took over last year and fortunately enough she selected me back then. I also scored in my first full start. It was a free-kick in a 3-0 win, also against Portugal, at Portsmouth's Fratton Park. If I had to pick out other highlights with England so far, I'd go for the first qualification for the World Cup finals in 2007 – drawing with France in Rennes to make sure we reached the finals.

I was ready for a new challenge after Everton.

I had eight good years with Everton and joining Liverpool in 2012 was perfect. Manager Matt Beard is somebody who puts so much trust into his players. Coming into a different environment with new players and foreign players really helped bring out the best in me and helped me realise

"As long as I play well for Liverpool I'd love to play on for England"



"Playing in the Champions League will be an important step for us"

what a player I could be. 'Beardie' has been fantastic for this club and helped put Liverpool Ladies in the position that we're in now.

I'd been trying to win the league for so long. When Katrin Omarsdottir scored the second goal in our title-decider against Bristol Academy, last season, I knew that was it. I won the FA Cup and League Cup with Everton, and I'd come so close to winning the league too but we lost out on goal difference to Arsenal. Becky Easton was part of that Everton team too and before the Bristol game we said to each other: this is the pitch that we lost the league on – let's not do it again.

Becky is one of the best people to have around at our club. She's been through different eras of the ladies game, has experienced the lows and is now sampling the highs. To be offered a professional contract at the age of 40 is fantastic. Becky played for Liverpool when things weren't as rosy for the women's game but has contributed towards the position the game is now in. I wish it had happened for the likes of Gill Coultard, Marieanne Spacey and many others too.

We'll fight to the end to retain our title. Our 1-0 home win against Notts County Ladies on 24 August put us into second


Becky Easton is a big influence

position in the FA WSL and although other teams have games in hand, there is pressure on them. It's very tight at the top of the table and with teams up there still to play each other, points will be lost. Our aim is not to drop a point between now and the end of the season.

We can't wait to play in the UEFA Women's Champions League. It will be an important step in the team's development. We have been drawn against the Swedish team Linkopings in the Round of 32 (the first leg will be played at the Select Security Stadium in Widnes on 8 or 9 October) and it's something the whole squad are really looking forward to. I played in the competition with Everton and, at club level, it is the best tournament in world football. This year Birmingham City gave a good account of themselves in reaching the semi-finals and showcased our league very well. Arsenal Ladies have also done that consistently over the years. It will be a fantastic experience for the girls and at the age of 30 I'm grateful that I can experience it again.

Midfielder Amanda Da Costa's diary returns next month

CAP THAT: MOST ENG CAPS

Ladies	Men
131 Fara Williams	**125** Peter Shilton
129 Rachel Yankey	**115** David Beckham
119 Gill Coultard	**114** Steven Gerrard
117 Casey Stoney	**108** Bobby Moore
115 Kelly Smith	**107** Ashley Cole
107 Alex Scott	**106** Frank Lampard
102 Rachel Unitt	**106** Bobby Charlton
95 Debbie Bampton	**105** Billy Wright





LFC v PFC
Tues 16 Sept
MATCHDAY ONE
PFC v LFC
Wed 26 Nov
MATCHDAY FIVE

LOOK OF THE DRAW

A closer look at the three clubs joining Liverpool FC in Group B of the UEFA Champions League 14/15



PFC Ludogorets Razgrad

The Bulgarian season started on 19 July but the Eagles have had an eventful time already. Aiming for their fourth consecutive domestic title, the Razgrad club sacked coach Stoycho Stoev after a 0-0 draw with Partizan Belgrade in the Champions League qualifiers and replaced him with academy director Georgi Dermendzhiev. Stoev's dismissal came after Ludogorets, based in northeastern Bulgaria, had won just one of their opening five fixtures. This is their first-ever appearance in the tournament's group stage.

UCL last season

2nd QR: Slovan Bratislava 2 PFC 1; PFC 3 Slovan Bratislava 0
3rd QR: PFC 2 FK Partizan 1; FK Partizan 0 PFC 1
Play-off: PFC 2 FC Basel 4; FC Basel 2 PFC 0

Europa League last season

Group: PSV 0 PFC 2; PFC 3 Dinamo Zagreb 0; Chornomorets Odesa 0 PFC 1; PFC 1 Chornomorets Odesa 1; PFC 2 PSV 0; Dinamo Zagreb 1 PFC 2
Round of 32: SS Lazio 0 PFC 1; PFC 3 SS Lazio 3
Round of 16: PFC 0 Valencia CF 3; Valencia CF 1 PFC 0

New arrivals

Anicet Abel; Brayan Angulo; Aleksandar Vasilev; Preslav Petrov; Wanderson; Hamza Younes; Steven Petkov

Head to head

No previous meetings with LFC

Honours

3 Bulgarian A Group (title); **2** Bulgarian Cup; **2** Bulgarian Supercup

Pub bore

Liverpool have played in Bulgaria on four previous occasions – all at Sofia's Vassil Levski stadium. The Reds have won three of the matches, two against CSKA and one versus Levski.

Newsflash

Ludogorets defeated Steaua Bucharest in the play-off round to reach the group stages, 6-5 in a sensational penalty shoot-out.

One to watch

Born in Sao Paolo, attacking midfielder Marcelinho scored twice in the third qualifying round second leg v Steaua and has 24 goals in 83 games in total.



FC Basel v LFC
Wed 1 Oct
MATCHDAY TWO
LFC v FC Basel
Tues 9 Dec
MATCHDAY SIX



FC Basel

The Swiss champions have won five domestic titles in succession. Veteran Argentine centre-back Walter Samuel will lead a young squad filled with talent from the club's academy. FC Basel have pedigree in Europe, reaching the semi-finals of the Europa League in 2012/13 then beating Chelsea home and away in last season's Champions League. After elimination, they entered the Europa League again, reaching the last eight before losing to Valencia CF.

UCL last season

3rd QR: FC Basel 1 Maccabi Tel Aviv 0; Maccabi Tel Aviv 3 FC Basel 3
Play-off: Ludogorets Razgrad 2 FC Basel 4; FC Basel 2 Ludogorets Razgrad 0
Group: Chelsea 1 FC Basel 2; FC Basel 0 Schalke 04 1; Steaua Bucharest 1 FC Basel 1; FC Basel 1 Steaua Bucharest 1; FC Basel 1 Chelsea 0; Schalke 04 2 FC Basel 0

Europa League last season

Round of 32: Maccabi Tel Aviv 0 FC Basel 0; FC Basel 3 Maccabi Tel Aviv 0
Round of 16: FC Basel 0 Red Bull Salzburg 0; Red Bull Salzburg 1 FC Basel 2
Quarter-finals: FC Basel 3 Valencia CF 0; Valencia CF 5 FC Basel 0

New arrivals

Tomas Vaclik; Walter Samuel; Luca Zuffi; Shkelzen Gashi; Marek Suchy

Head to head

2 draws with LFC

Honours

17 Swiss Super League
11 Swiss Cup

Pub bore

Legendary Peruvian striker Teofilo Cubillas played 10 games for FC Basel (scoring three goals) during the 1973/74 season.

Newsflash

Former QPR, Swansea City and Leicester City boss Paulo Sousa was appointed as FC Basel manager in May after Murat Yakin moved to Spartak Moscow.

One to watch

Central defender Fabian Schar, 22, has scored three times in eight appearances for the Swiss national team and is expected to be a future captain for FC Basel.


adidas
LFC v Real Madrid CF
Wed 22 Oct
MATCHDAY THREE
Real Madrid CF v LFC
Tues 4 Nov
MATCHDAY FOUR



Real Madrid CF

Last season's *La Decima* triumph more than made amends for a disappointing domestic campaign in which Real were trumped by neighbours Atletico in La Liga. Once again they've been busy in the transfer market, signing World Cup golden boot winner James Rodriguez from AS Monaco and German ace Toni Kroos from FC Bayern. Goalkeeper Keylor Navas, who kept three clean sheets in five games for Costa Rica in the World Cup, will compete with Iker Casillas for the no1 jersey, while Angel Di Maria, who excelled in last May's final win over Atletico, has of course moved to Manchester United.

UCL last season

Group: Galatasaray 1 Real 6; Real 4 FC Copenhagen 0; Real 2 Juventus FC 1; Juventus FC 2 Real 2; Real 4 Galatasaray 1; FC Copenhagen 0 Real 2

Round of 16: Schalke 04 1 Real 6; Real 3 Schalke 04 1

Quarter-final: Real 3 Borussia Dortmund 0; Borussia Dortmund 2 Real 0

Semi-final: Real 1 FC Bayern Munchen 0; FC Bayern Munchen 0 Real 4

Final: Real 4 Atletico Madrid 1

New arrivals

Keylor Navas; Toni Kroos; James Rodriguez

Head to head

3 LFC wins

Honours

10 European Cup / UCL
2 UEFA Cup
2 UEFA Super Cup
3 FIFA Club World Cup
32 La Liga

Pub bore

Cristiano Ronaldo, along with Barcelona's Lionel Messi, is four goals shy of Raul's record of 71 in the Champions League.

Newsflash

Zinedine Zidane, assistant to Carlo Ancelotti last year, is now coaching Castilla – the club's professionally-run B team in the third tier of Spanish football.

One to watch

According to FIFA's Castrol Index ranking, midfielder Toni Kroos was the World Cup's standout performer with an average score of 9.79.

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THE 32



Here are 2014/15's eight groups of four

The 2014/15 UEFA Champions League is the 60th season of Europe's premier club football tournament, and the 23rd since it was renamed from the European Cup to the Champions League. This will be the first season where clubs must comply with UEFA Financial Fair Play Regulations in order to participate.

The final will be staged on Saturday 6 June 2015 at Berlin's Olympiastadion, which holds over 74,000 spectators. Opened in 1936 for that year's Olympic Games, it's the home of Hertha Berlin who were promoted back to the Bundesliga at the end of last season. The venue staged three matches at the 1974 World Cup finals and six more in 2006, including the final between France and Italy. It's hosted every German Cup final since 1985.

GROUP A
Club Atletico de Madrid
Juventus FC
Malmo FF
Olympiacos FC

GROUP B
FC Basel
Liverpool FC
PFC Ludogorets Razgrad
Real Madrid CF

GROUP C
AS Monaco
Bayer 04 Leverkusen
FC Zenit
SL Benfica

GROUP D
Arsenal FC
Borussia Dortmund
Galatasaray AS
RSC Anderlecht

GROUP E
AS Roma
FC Bayern Munchen
Manchester City FC
PFC CSKA Moskva

GROUP F
AFC Ajax
APOEL FC
FC Barcelona
Paris St-Germain

GROUP G
Chelsea FC
FC Schalke 04
NK Maribor
Sporting Clube de Portugal

GROUP H
Athletic Club
FC BATE Borisov
FC Porto
FC Shakhtar Donetsk

Reds reaction

What Brendan Rodgers thought of the draw and some fascinating UCL facts and figures

Like the fans Brendan Rodgers was delighted for the club to be grouped with Real Madrid CF. "That was last season's hard work, what we were working towards – getting Liverpool back into a competition where we are synonymous. To be back in it again, no matter who we were going to play, it was always going to be exciting. But to have Real Madrid in your group, the champions last season, is special. I'm already thinking of Anfield on that night, but there are two other good teams in it along with us. It's a tough group but we'll really look forward to the challenge."

Elsewhere on Twitter, there was this from striker Daniel Sturridge: 'Saucy little draw we've got there… Let's do the damn ting'. And from former defender Jamie Carragher: 'Great draw for LFC – decent chance to get through and the experience for the players of playing against Madrid'.

This is Liverpool FC's 21st campaign in Europe's premier tournament – 12 in the old European Cup and now nine in the UCL. The fixture at FC Basel on Wednesday 1 October will be LFC's 100th game in the Champions League since it was re-branded.

Matchday one's home fixture with PFC Ludogorets Razgrad should take the total aggregate crowd to have witnessed Champions League encounters at Anfield beyond the two million-mark. To date 1,970,061 fans have seen UCL games at L4.

Liverpool's next victory in the competition will be their 100th. The overall LFC record in the tournament is: played 175, won 99, drawn 39, lost 37, goals for 317, goals against 144. The Reds have faced 39 different teams with the most games coming against Chelsea and PSV Eindhoven, both six.

Reds captain Steven Gerrard has made 81 appearances in the Champions League – ten behind club record-holder Jamie Carragher. No Liverpool player has scored more goals in the competition than the skipper, with 28. The closest is former LFC striker Dirk Kuyt with 12, then Peter Crouch (11) and Luis Garcia (10).

Only one ex-Red has played a full 90 minutes in a Champions League final since 2007, Liverpool's last appearance – Javier Mascherano, for Barcelona v Manchester United at Wembley in 2011. Three have appeared as substitutes: Nicolas Anelka, an extra-time sub for Chelsea v United in Moscow in 2008; Fernando Torres, an 84th minute sub for Chelsea v Bayern Munich in the Bavarian capital in 2012; and Nuri Sahin, a 92nd minute sub for Borussia Dotmund v Bayern Munich at Wembley in 2013. Earlier this year Xabi Alonso missed Real Madrid's win over city neighbours Atletico in Lisbon, while Alvaro Arbeloa was an unused sub on the bench.

Supporters can celebrate Liverpool's return to Champions League football by adding two special patches to the new Warrior home kit for the 2014/15 campaign. One bears an image of the trophy, the other the iconic Champions League brand. Find out more at **www.liverpoolfc.com.**

Last time out: LFC v Fiorentina in Dec 2009



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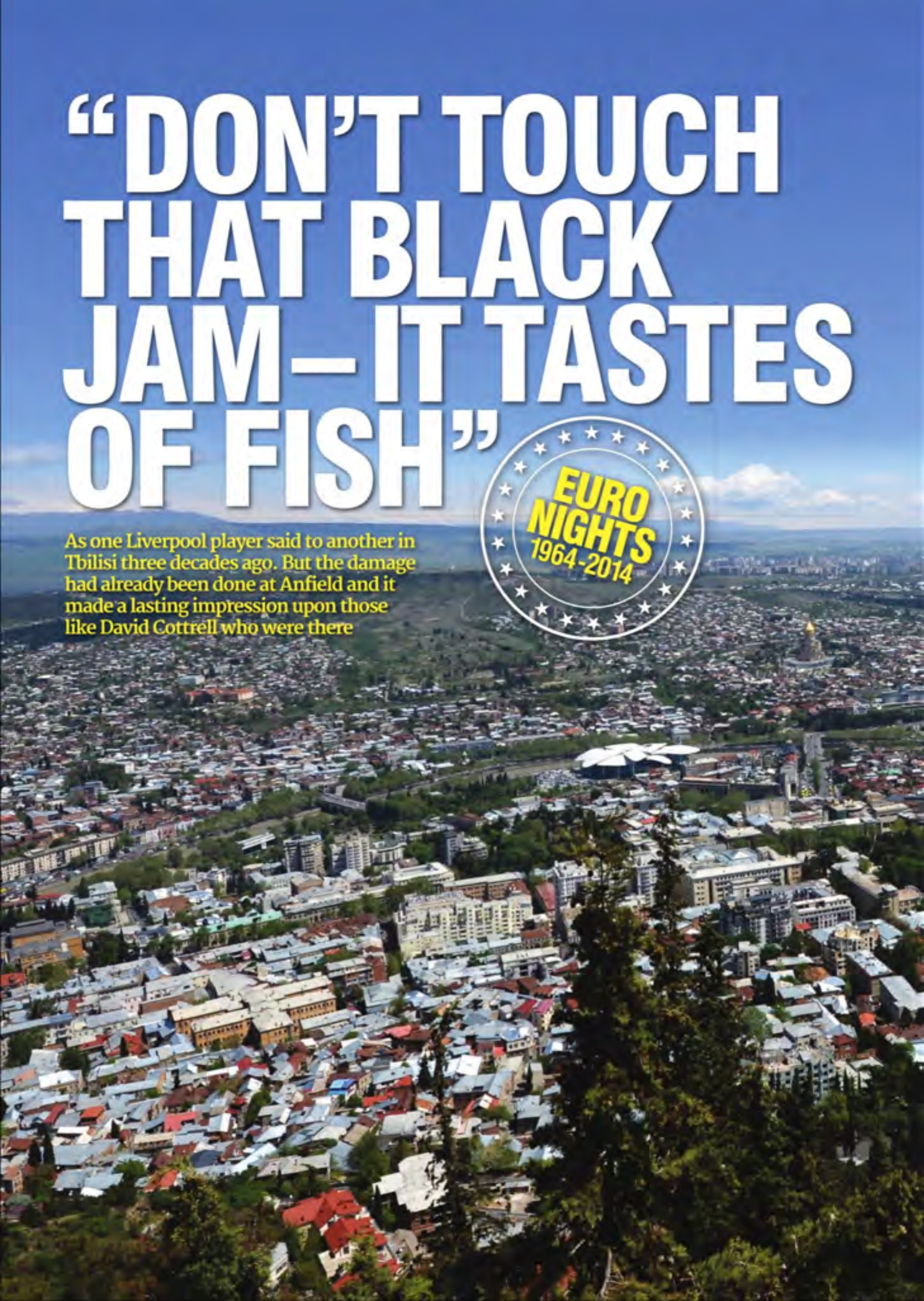
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"DON'T TOUCH THAT BLACK JAM – IT TASTES OF FISH"

As one Liverpool player said to another in Tbilisi three decades ago. But the damage had already been done at Anfield and it made a lasting impression upon those like David Cottrell who were there

Nobody was kidding themselves on the way out of Anfield but my father gave it his best shot. "What a team that was," said my uncle with barely concealed glee. Like a fair few Evertonians he'd go to watch the neighbours if the fixture was enticing enough and here was a rare chance to wind us up. "That's you out of the European Cup – you won't beat that lot over there."

I remember staring at the pavement on that mid-September evening in 1979 as we weaved home through the crowds, all those quick-moving feet as disorienting as the display of football we'd just witnessed from Dinamo Tbilisi, the Georgian team that was making its debut in the competition. My dad must have sensed my despondency and rattled the sabre of defiance – something along the lines of Liverpool finishing the job in the second leg. I was 12 years old but already I'd seen enough matches to know that somehow we'd established a 2-1 lead while being played off the park, and our chances of winning the European Cup for a third time in four years had diminished if not vanished completely.

In the late 70s we fell in love with that big beautiful trophy. It seemed to have been fashioned on some sun-drenched riviera, a world away from the dark grey skies of northwest England. If the domestic league


PEN PICTURES OF THE STARS FROM GEORGIA

DINAMO TBILISI

They're used to big crowds

Their record in Europe

EIGHT DRAWS... THEN NO POINTS!

championship trophy had the august allure of Julie Andrews then the European Cup was all Sophia Loren, its gleaming curves and convex reflections exerting a Grail-like pull. And three months after the surprise success of Nottingham Forest, who'd eliminated Liverpool on their way to winning the tournament, we were suffering withdrawal symptoms.

We had the consolation of an eleventh English title, leading from start to finish over season 1978/79 and amassing a record 68 points (under the old system of two for a win). After a summer in which Pope John Paul II had toured his Polish homeland, *Kramer vs Kramer* played at packed cinemas, and Seve Ballesteros, Viv Richards, Bjorn Borg and Billie Jean King dominated the sporting headlines, Liverpool manager Bob Paisley had been hoping for a low-key return to European action.

His programme notes for the first round first leg said as much: 'Tonight we meet a Russian team [sic] for the first time in Europe, and Dinamo Tbilisi will give us something to think about, here and on their own ground. I would be less than honest if I said I viewed tonight's challenge as being more difficult than the one which came from Forest last season – they don't and they won't come any harder than that test. But it will still be difficult, make no mistake. [Dinamo] are well into their season and will be at peak fitness'.

Paisley admitted that the Georgians were an unknown quantity. His chief scout, the wily Tom Saunders, had



Old Tbilisi (1868) by Ivan Aivazovsky



"In those days a trip behind the Iron Curtain was always a bit of an adventure"

been dispatched to the Eastern Bloc prior to the tie to find out more. Having commenced in March, the Soviet season had only two months to run and Dinamo were chasing a second successive title in the 16-club Supreme League.

Years later Saunders would recall: "A trip behind the Iron Curtain was an adventure. People who couldn't speak a word of English would welcome me, and over a couple of days we would forge a relationship through football. In turn it was up to me to look after them when they came over here. When Dinamo's scout arrived I invited him down to the Boot Room and offered him a Guinness. He quickly got the taste for it and by the time I got him back to his hotel I needed some assistance to get him out of the car. For a long time afterwards we exchanged Christmas cards."

Black stuff and pleasantries were set aside before kick-off when Dinamo famously warmed up in front of the Spion Kop – a gesture unheard-of for a visiting team. The Soviet ambassador was among a modest crowd of 35,000 which expected a routine home win despite the absence through injury of Alan Hansen and Ray Kennedy.

Dinamo, coached by Nodar Akhalkatsi and featuring seven USSR internationals, had other ideas. I can still see their swarming white shirts, hear the murmurs of awed appreciation for their one-touch football from Anfield's terraces. Assiduous and artful from the first whistle, they played like the old Brazil – a Soviet side with Latin flair orchestrated by a roaming midfielder called David Kipiani. 'In Russia', the Liverpool matchday programme had warned, 'his reputation is such that he is often accorded the "privilege" of being given a personal marker'. Not that night, to our cost.

Through the wonky parallax of hindsight the game is now more of a general impression in my mind, but contemporary reports confirm that the Georgians had opportunities to score before Liverpool's local-born striker David Johnson beat goalkeeper Otar Gabileya with a firm header on 20 minutes. They were level on the half-hour when libero Aleksandr Chivadze surged forward from his own half and collected a return pass from striker Ramas Schengeliya to prod the ball past Ray Clemence.

Schengeliya, at 22 the Soviet player of the year, then missed a chance before Jimmy Case drilled a free-kick hard, low and through the jumping Dinamo wall just before half-time after Kenny Dalglish had been upended outside the penalty area. The second period followed much the same pattern minus any more goals and did little to reassure the hosts. Liverpool were lucky and we knew it.

Gabeliya, deputising that night for Dinamo's first-choice goalkeeper David Gogiya, would go on to make 271 appearances for the club. "I'd joined with Schengeliya a couple of years earlier and we'd been welcomed by established stars like Kipiani, Chivadze and striker Vladimir Gutsaev," he'd later reflect. "The coach Akhalkatsi devoted his life to bringing success to Dinamo. The club was full of wonderful people and everybody had one aim. It wouldn't happen overnight, but the tie

Jimmy Case thumps home Liverpool's first-leg winner



David Kipiani in Soviet kit and above right in the Dinamo wall

against Liverpool showed that we were climbing to the top."

Listening to the first leg on a radio 2,300 miles away was another 12-year-old with pictures of Liverpool players on his bedroom wall. David Javakhishvili is now consul at the Georgian Embassy in London. He remembers how important Dinamo's display was to a country striving to preserve its identity. "The previous year there had been peaceful protests against plans to make Russian the country's official language. Georgia is only a small country but we are very proud and have a rich history. We took to the streets of the capital and solved the problem. In those days Dinamo wasn't only a force in the old Soviet championship, which was a strong league – we were the standard-bearers for a whole nation. But a lot of kids supported English clubs as well. I had pictures of Kenny Dalglish and Steve Heighway on my bedroom wall. We heard how well it went in Liverpool but not in our wildest dreams did we believe we'd go through."

"Not in our wildest dreams did we really believe we'd beat Liverpool"

Tbilisi, with a population just under one million, was sports-mad. The city had had four indoor and six outdoor Olympic-sized pools, almost 400 basketball or volleyball courts, 19 tennis courts, 31 football pitches and five stadiums – the pick of which was the immense Stadion Dinamo, recently refurbished to incorporate a continuous upper tier covered by a roof. Another concrete marvel was the new Ministry of Highway Construction Building, completed in 1975. Its spectacular raised grid of interlocking forms was a product of Soviet 'Space City' architecture which aimed to create an 'experience of psychological

comfort' and 'well-being in the people'.

In 1978 the people had been decidedly unimpressed by a proposed change in the constitutional status of the indigenous Georgian language – so much so that the country's Communist Party chief Eduard Shevardnadze extracted a rare concession from Moscow: while Russian would be taught more widely, Georgian would remain the state language. A new spirit of nationalism had begun to stir. But if Tbilisi at the time was a city resolutely defying the Soviet yoke, Liverpool was at low ebb in the supposedly affluent West. As Britain under a new monetarist government slowly recovered from the high inflation and industrial action of the 'winter of discontent' (it was an eleven-week strike by technicians that kept the tie's first leg off television screens) Liverpool felt like it was trapped in terminal decline. Once the major transatlantic port of the British Empire, it lay marooned on the wrong side of the country thanks to fundamental shifts in world trade. If things seem tough today, revisiting the history books makes for bleak reading: in a single decade 350 of its factories had closed or moved elsewhere and 40,000 jobs had been lost. But the football team remained a source of local pride with its python-like grip upon the English game, and in the summer of 1979 it became the first in the UK to exploit the commercial potential of shirt sponsorship.

Liverpool always chartered an Aer Lingus short-haul jet for European trips with an amiable Irish captain called Barney Croughan who would liven up flights with bogus announcements of engine failure or a fifth whisky in



Tbilisi's Ministry of Highway Construction Building



"Tbilisi fans were leaping out of the stands and running to the edge of the pitch"

the cockpit. This time, however, the Soviet authorities insisted that the club forsake its familiar BAC One-Eleven for two Aeroflot TU-154B planes which would take the team, officials and a small group of intrepid fans (including a friend of my 'owlfella' who brought back a much-cherished match programme) to Tbilisi via Moscow – a near 5,000-mile round trip with 'gruelling' written all over it.

For years to come Liverpool's players would recall the entire experience with a peculiarly British and comic insularity. There were tales of the team being woken in the middle of the night by chanting crowds outside their Tbilisi hotel and a furious Peter Robinson, LFC's old-school club secretary, remonstrating in his pyjamas with receptionists in the foyer. At a champagne-and-caviar reception David Johnson allegedly wandered over to Jimmy Case and warned, "Don't touch that black jam – it tastes of fish." Overall the place was dismissed as grim. It's a safe bet no one was acquainted with Ivan Aivazovsky's delightful painting of *Old Tbilisi* which shows a warren of white-washing buildings under a low, almost Levantine sun in the shadow of the Caucasus mountains.

Back on Merseyside, around four o'clock on the afternoon of 3 October 1979, like thousands of kids I ran home from school in time to catch the second half of the second leg on the radio, Britain being three hours behind Georgia. It was still goalless at the interval but a hat-trick of unnervingly loud roars from the record 110,000 crowd in the Stadion Dinamo greeted the goals which changed all that. Subsequent TV footage would show Kipiani skinning Hansen on the right and crossing for Gutsaev to score at the far post and dangle deliriously from the goal netting; Dinamo centre-back Georgi Chilaia running fifty yards before slipping the ball inside for Schengeliya to clip over the onrushing Clemence; and finally Chivadze converting from the penalty spot after Gutsaev had been fouled, and a photographer darting into the six-yard box to take close-ups of a crestfallen Clem on his knees.

In his autobiography Kenny Dalglish later wrote: 'Tbilisi fans were leaping out of the stands, running to the edge of the pitch. Dinamo played some wonderful football in the second half which we simply couldn't live with'. Once again Liverpool had crashed out of Europe at the first hurdle. But if the defeat to Forest had been painful, this was chastening. Slumped against the big wooden music cabinet that sat in our living-room corner like a coffin, the BBC's faraway commentary now over, I contemplated another season without that wonderful trophy.

"After the final whistle we stayed in the stadium for nearly an hour celebrating," says David Javakhishvili. "I was with my own father and uncle. We were all season-ticket holders but that night nobody sat in their usual places. You just budged up on the

long wooden benches, making room for your fellow Georgians to see the match. It poured with rain before kick-off and everybody was worried that the weather would suit the English team. But against Liverpool it just clicked.

"Kipiani, the playmaker with the silky touch, it's hard to express how we felt about him. And Chilaia dribbling like Messi to set up Schengeliya's goal – that was the first and last time he did something like that. It was an evening when everything fell into place."

Which is where, for one season at least, the fairy tale ended. In the next round Dinamo lost 6-3 on aggregate to eventual finalists Hamburger SV. The story goes that Peter Robinson contacted the German club, for whom Liverpool's old striker Kevin Keegan now played, before the tie to forewarn them about the long trip to Tbilisi and any dead-of-night disturbances.

The following season, while Liverpool recovered to claim the European Cup for a third time, Dinamo struck gold in the Cup Winners Cup. In the final in Dusseldorf they beat East German side Carl Zeiss Jena 2-1, their goals scored by Gutsaev and midfielder Vitali Darselia, with Kipiani providing the winning assist. To this day they remain only the second former Soviet club (after Dynamo Kyiv of Ukraine) to win a European trophy, and in 2011 the players were honoured by their country as 'knights of sports' on the 30th anniversary of 'the greatest-ever victory in the history of Georgian football'. Goalkeeper Gabeliya would say: "In 1981 each player and all the people in charge did everything in their power to bring happiness to the Georgian people, and we celebrate 13 May, the day of the final, as we would our own birthdays."

At the following summer's World Cup finals in sunny Spain, Chivadze and Schengeliya, who hold the Dinamo records for most European appearances (40) and most European goals (19) respectively, were in the USSR team that drew 2-2 with a Scotland side featuring Alan Hansen and Graeme Souness. Missing from the Soviet squad was Kipiani, who'd suffered a badly broken leg in an exhibition tournament in Madrid. Neither he nor Dinamo would be quite the same force again. In September 2001, aged fifty, Kipiani died in a car crash in Georgia. A *New York Times* obituary hailed a footballer who 'could play with artistry few men could summon... Had he been born in the West, he would have been a millionaire. Had he been a Russian, he would have defected to the lure of offers that came his way. But he was Georgian to the core and understood that the style he could command, the freedom his play suggested, meant so much to countless Georgians who identified with him'.

"Kipiani, the silky playmaker, it's difficult to express how we felt about him"



From the Dinamo-Liverpool matchday programme


Chivadze beats Clem and the Reds are out








L.F.C.

The kid from the Guadalquivir

It's a fair way from Spain's southern jewel to the shores of the River Mersey in northwest England but Alberto Moreno tells John Hynes he's eager to acclimatise to life at Anfield

Some of Alberto Moreno's tattoos are more visible than others – such as the inking on his leg that carries the dates of birth and first initials of his parents entwined in a Mayan bracelet.

Others are hidden. He lifts his training top to reveal writing on his torso and the back of his neck. Among them is the word 'effort' in Greek. A quick roll-up of his sleeve reveals an upper arm detailed with more images. A four-leaf clover needs no explanation. Next to it is a drawing of the Seville skyline. Just as the city on the River Mersey means so much to every Scouser, so the jewel on the Guadalquivir is clearly close to this Spaniard's heart.

"Alonso, Reina and Arbeloa told me I can grow a lot here as a player"

Born and raised in the famous Andalusian city, Alberto joined Sevilla as a 13-year-old. From there he progressed through the youth ranks where Antonio Puerta, the defender who tragically died after collapsing on the pitch in 2007, was one of the senior players he revered. After spending time operating at both left-back and as a winger in the reserves, a first-team debut came his way against Athletic Bilbao in 2012.

With all that in mind it's easy to see why he was so emotional at last month's UEFA Super Cup game between Real Madrid and Sevilla. The tears flowed while he waved goodbye to supporters at Cardiff's Millennium Stadium. "I am living a strange situation because I'm leaving the club of my life," he explained after the match. "I was always aware of the two teams [trying] to reach agreement. I never got into that, but Sevilla have understood that Liverpool's offer was good and I am going.

"What happened on the pitch [in Cardiff] with the fans will remain forever etched on me and I could not help but mourn because I did not expect it. First came the parting with colleagues, then with the fans – all very complicated."

It was clearly a lot to take in for the 22-year-old. He'd been living his childhood dream, playing for the team he supported, and performing well. Thoughts of spending the

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rest of his career there must have understandably entered his mind.

Being around his family was also a part of the idyllic equation. During numerous interviews while at Sevilla he consistently mentioned the role his parents played in helping him to become a footballer.

There's also his brother Diego. Despite being a fan of city rivals Real Betis, he was regularly spotted at games supporting his sibling. They have some matching tattoos "to signify the bond between us," Alberto says. Their close relationship was also demonstrated when Alberto recorded his first senior goal and immediately looked towards a jubilant Diego in the stands. So leaving all of that behind can't have been an easy decision. Yet the lure of Liverpool's pulsating football under Brendan Rodgers must have made it easier. "Liverpool are a great team," Moreno acknowledges.

"It's not long since I broke into Sevilla's team, I still have a lot to learn"

Boot room boy and Sevilla star (below)

The deal took some time to complete, so Alberto did his research by contacting several of Liverpool's former players from Spain. "I spoke with Xabi Alonso, Pepe Reina and Alvaro Arbeloa." The word from the trio, 702 LFC appearances between them, was overwhelmingly positive. "They told me this is a spectacular club whose fans follow it in a very special way. They all told me I can grow a lot here as a footballer."

There was also another source of information to consult, Luis Alberto. The midfielder joined Liverpool from Sevilla in the summer of 2013 and the pair had been young team-mates there. The message was similar to what Moreno had already heard: "Luis said the city has its own special way of following football and people are very respectful. He said it's incredible when you go out on the pitch at Anfield as the fans are very supportive and they will always be behind me. They all told me I'd feel happy here."

Others with Sevilla links could also offer an insight on the English game, such as the Manchester-based pair David de Gea and Alvaro Negredo. There was no need to consult anyone else – Moreno was sold. "I haven't spoken to them [De Gea and Negredo] as yet but I'm sure we'll get a chance to do so. In my view Liverpool is the best club in England and I couldn't waste an opportunity to come and play for them. Apart from being a great club historically, I know people here see football in a unique way."

All of this has happened at quite a pace. As he points out: "I was promoted to the [Sevilla] first team only a year-and-a-half ago. I know that's not a long time and I still have a lot to learn and improve."

Alberto's pedigree and potential is clear – a European Under-21 medal following Spain's success in the



Alberto is looking forward to Euro nights

tournament last year offers evidence of that. During their triumph in Israel – it concluded with a 4-2 win over an Italy side including Fabio Borini in the final – Moreno lined up with De Gea, Bayern Munich's Thiago Alcantara, Barcelona's Cristian Tello (on loan at Porto) and Real Madrid's Isco.

His performances for both that multi-talented team and Sevilla were enough to earn him a call up to the senior national side in October of last year, as the Spanish completed their World Cup qualifying campaign with a 2-0 home victory over Georgia. Manager Vicente del Bosque also included him as part of the 30-man squad prior to travelling to Brazil, although when it was later reduced to 23 he just missed out. Jordi Alba – a player he says he looks up to – and Cesar Azpilicueta got the left-back berths.

"For such a young player his tactical awareness is really excellent"

Younger than that duo, Moreno knows success at Liverpool could help him move up the pecking order. And, according to writer Heath Chesters of the website *Inside Spanish Football*, our new defender definitely possesses the talent. "For such a young player, his tactical and positional awareness is excellent. Watching that side of his game is like watching a player with a lot more experience under his belt.

"Sevilla, under manager Unai Emery, have mostly played a counter-attacking game, which often saw Moreno getting forward on the overlap to assist moves. He was always conscious of his defensive responsibility however, getting back into position quickly and efficiently."

Such qualities suggest he can and will slot into the Brendan Rodgers way of playing. And his powerful build should help him deal with the ultra-competitive nature of English football. If anything, it might suit him even more than the La Liga environment in which he's grown up.

"He's collected a few yellow cards and one red," Chesters points out. "This is due to the physical nature of his game, rather than being rash in challenges. One has to bear in mind that in England he probably won't collect as many cards as referees are more permissive of strong, physical challenges than in Spain."

Acclimatising to both a new style of football and different way of life is never easy, but Alberto is taking it in his stride. "I haven't really faced too many difficulties so far," he says. "So I don't think about anything like that. I'm enjoying myself and would rather keep going that way."

In senior action for Spain last October

1492 AND ALL THAT



Like Liverpool, only about three centuries earlier, Seville was a European gateway to the New World. Both cities have famous tobacco buildings: Seville's factory was the setting for the opera *Carmen* and is now part of the university; Liverpool's warehouse is reputedly the world's largest brick building and stands opposite a new hotel at Stanley Dock. Christopher Columbus set sail from Seville, so it's no wonder the city has so many monuments to him. But his statue outside Sefton Park's Palm House is the only one of its kind in Britain, and his bust also appears on a building opposite LFC's offices on Chapel Street.


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LAST OF THE BREED

Ronnie Moran turned 80 last February. Twelve months earlier Simon Hughes met the oldest living member of the famed Anfield Boot Room at his Liverpool home…

Watching him use a walking stick to manoeuvre his hulking body through the front door of a bungalow where he lives in a luxury retirement complex, it is imaginable that in his prime Ronnie Moran was not a man to be crossed.

In his playing days, indeed, he was a fiercely competitive left-back and in an alternative life would surely have had the physique and tactical sporting mind to compete as an amateur boxer.

Placing his paisley-patterned flat cap and heavy winter coat onto a wooden stand, he invites me into what he calls "the trophy room" and presents me with one of many photographs from a magnolia-coloured wall. It includes his four closest friends in football, Bill Shankly, Bob Paisley, Joe Fagan and Reuben Bennett.

"I'm the only one still here – I feel very fortunate to have been part of it"

"Every morning I wake up and sit looking at that crowd," he says, lightly grinning and pointing with thick-set fingers. "I remind myself that I'm the only one still here. It's very sad when you think that all that knowledge has been lost. But I also feel very fortunate to have been a part of it. They were a good bunch. I miss them."

Although Moran had already served Liverpool across three decades by the start of the 80s, I decided to interview him because he is the only person still alive with genuine inside knowledge that can contribute towards explaining why the club sustained its culture of success for so long, and the mind-set behind the staff that helped make the 80s become Liverpool's most dominant decade in terms of trophies.

After just a few minutes speaking to Moran, you quickly sense the base qualities in an individual that when placed in a collective, helped make Liverpool great. His loyalty to those he shared the Boot Room with is admirable. His uncompromising









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attitude towards commitment is also evident. "Football is about character, see," he says, directing a stern finger in my direction. "The minimum you can ask is to give your best. With that and with the right people around you, you've got a chance"…

[Ronnie recalls his early years as a player at Anfield, then the arrival of Bill Shankly as manager in 1959]. In the seven years since Moran's debut, Liverpool had languished in the Second Division for five of them with limited sign of progression.

"Bill saved the club," Moran beams. "After the first day of training under him, I knew he was going to be a success. He insisted on playing in the five-a-sides. His enthusiasm infected everybody else. He would never finish on the losing team. At first, the players thought it was funny because he got so wound up. But after a while, we desperately wanted to beat him too. These games ended up as Mexican stand-offs because nobody liked losing. Shanks would go round kicking the young lads. He'd do anything to win. It rubbed off on everyone."

Shankly surrounded himself with a staff that shared a similar mentality towards defeat. Bob Paisley, Reuben Bennett, Joe Fagan and eventually Moran himself would form the staff team. It instilled a simple culture of winning at football matches.

"You saw Reuben, he was a goalkeeper and in his 50s. But he'd take part in the pre-season and never finish outside the top 10 in the sprints. Joe was that way as well. I was always a bit porky but I could shift as well and Bill recognised that. He knew my

Treating John Toshack, November 1975



"Bill saved the club – after the first day I knew he'd be a success"

attitude was right. He knew that I wouldn't accept losing easily."

In 1966, after 343 games for Liverpool, Moran joined the coaching staff and continued playing in Fagan's reserve team for a further two years, helping the club's younger players. He admits that he was "sometimes harsh," on his subjects.

"I enjoyed it. I was a tough player and reacted well to discipline. I was on the staff for a reason. Everybody was different and I brought the discipline. Players need to be kept on their



On the bench, 1983/84

toes. In my first few years as a player, Liverpool were relegated. A few years before that, the club was top of the league and won the Championship. If you settle and think everything's okay, you can get into trouble. Even during my playing days, I'd do extra training on the field near where I lived after getting home from Melwood. It used to drive the wife mad but it was what I had to do. I'd try and be different from the fly-by-nights that came in and didn't do the extra work. When I was the coach, I asked for the same off the lads.

"It didn't bother me who they were; how much they'd won. If they weren't trying as they should be, I'd let them know. There was one player – I won't tell you his name – but he was an international defender and he was making dangerous passes out of defence. It was putting us under pressure. I told him in no uncertain terms that he needed to learn how to get rid at certain times. We wanted the team to keep the possession but not if it meant conceding a goal. I shouted at the lad for weeks until he stopped doing it.

"I'd bump into a lot of players that moved elsewhere and they'd come up to me and say, 'Ronnie, you were tough with us. I wish I'd listened because I'm getting chased out of my [current] club for not working hard enough'. There was a lot like that, even from Bill's day."

Moran says his direct approach extended to matches. Afterwards, he would entertain opposing coaches and managers in the Boot Room in a beguiling manner, attempting to accrue information about their teams for future reference. But during games, Moran's voice was heard louder than anyone else in the dugout. If there was a problem, he would attempt to "sort it."

"You couldn't do it now because there are so many cameras around Anfield," he says. "Every argument would be picked up on. But back then, there was a lot of activity between both benches. It's funny now when

I hear people talk about 'mind games' because we were the first to do that. There was nothing malicious about it but you'd try and get whatever edge you could over the opposition.

"That stretched to the bench too. I remember arguing many times with Alex Ferguson when he became manager of United in the 80s. I like Fergie because he's a football man and there needs to be more of them. But when he first started at United, we'd be bickering all the way through games. It must have been the Celtic blood in us. We were two benches made up of Scots, Irish and Welshmen. There was bound to be a bit of conflict. Fergie gave as good as he got. All I can say is, I didn't teach him any swear words."

Throughout this interview, Moran speaks about Ferguson with reverence. Despite the enduring enmity between Liverpool and the club that Ferguson represents, he continuously emphasises the idea that United have scaled the heights by following similar principles to those once held at Liverpool…

"You don't have to be a genius to realise that if you repeat something, you get better at it," Moran continues. "We'd tell the players to try and pass to the nearest red shirt in space. If that didn't happen, it was the nearest red shirt even if he was marked. And if that wasn't possible, look for something else. This wasn't rocket science. Over the years, the lads got to know the drill. And because there were five or six of us on the staff that thought the same way, when Bill retired, it passed to Bob and the same from Bob to Joe and Joe to Kenny. Not much would change. It made it easier for the staff and easier for the players."

There was a commonly-held belief about the style of football Liverpool should try and execute. But there was no dogma. Liverpool could adapt accordingly when they needed to. That's why they were considered the most streetwise team in Europe. "With football, it's all about getting the balance right between the team and the individual. You need to have a team where the individual can express himself. You need the clever ones, the ones with it up there. But you also need the ones that will do all the donkey work."

Fundamentally, though, one character trait linked all of Liverpool's players. "They mustn't like losing," Moran insists, not for the first time. "You can't have someone that comes up with excuses like injuries, either. After that, you had to love playing. I knew a few – even back then – that didn't care what was going on. They didn't last long. You had to really care, like anything in life. If you care, you try harder and do better."



At the recent 1963/64 title winners reunion

Moran retired from Liverpool in 1998 following 46 consecutive years with the club. Until recently, he would spend Tuesdays and Fridays at Melwood, walking around the perimeter of the training pitch for his morning constitutional on the invitation of former player and assistant manager Sammy Lee. "I'd never look at what was going on," he says. "It wouldn't be right, nosing into someone else's business."

With that, it really dawns how privacy was arguably Liverpool's greatest strength. Moran has a knack of telling

"It didn't matter who they were – if they weren't trying I let them know"

you something interesting but not the interesting thing you really want to know. At his age, the mind searches for an answer that sometimes it cannot offer. Yet I am also convinced that this is a tactic indoctrinated into him - not to reveal too much. At the end of our conversation, when I've stopped making notes, he places his hand on my shoulder and says with an emphasis, "I haven't let too much slip there, have I?"

Moran informs me that he has been offered book deals before, "to tell stories about fights and girls." But he did not feel comfortable complying with the idea. "I stopped after that was suggested," he explains.

In keeping with Boot Room traditions, Moran never sought the limelight and never promoted himself above his colleagues or the team. It was the Liverpool Way to deal with any problems internally. "We were no different to Manchester United," he says. "You see Fergie, he didn't let many leaks out did he?"

Like those that supposedly protected the Ark of the Covenant, Moran will take many of Liverpool's most intimate secrets to his place of rest. But I leave him believing that perhaps it was Liverpool's simplicity that outsiders found most complex.

"Them lot there," he says, pointing again at the photograph from the beginning of our meeting. "They didn't want to lose. That's what football boils down to."

This is an abridged version of the chapter in Red Machine: Liverpool in the 1980s the Players' Stories, out now in paperback.



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THE RYAN AND CONOR SHOW

Academy ace Ryan McLaughlin and elder sibling Conor talk football – real and virtual – with Simon Hughes


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MCLAUGHLIN
AGE: 23
CLUB: FLEETWOOD
NUMBER: 2
PREVIOUS CLUBS:
LINFIELD,
PRESTON
NORTH END
NAME:
RYAN
MCLAUGHLIN
AGE: 19
CLUB: LIVERPOOL
NUMBER: 43
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"Lads from Northern Ireland don't give out praise to one another," Conor McLaughlin says when asked about the sporting qualities of his younger brother Ryan. "Conor's usually very uncomfortable anyway in these situations…" Ryan replies. "Talking, I mean."

The verbal sparring goes back and forth. This interview is punctuated with the kind of put-downs you'd expect between brothers who spend their days inside dressing-rooms filled with professional footballers; places where the culture of one-upmanship is as natural as breathing.

For photographic purposes, Ryan and Conor engage in a contest on a well-known football-themed computer game via an equally well-known game console at their apartment in Liverpool's city-centre. Ryan takes the lead before Conor eventually prevails, with the former claiming it was his aim to "entertain the crowd" rather than to win. Conor is "anti-football," he claims when the final whistle is blown and the scoreline three-to-two but not in his favour. Conor just sits there smiling. Briefly there is silence.

The magazine has brought the pair together because in May, Ryan became the first Liverpool player to represent Northern Ireland in 78 years.



Conor 3 Ryan 2

"We've always been like this – you've got to be quick-witted to survive"

The last was the legendary Elisha Scott, a keeper whose career at Anfield spanned three decades and 468 games. During a post-season tour of South America, Ryan earned his first cap against Uruguay as a second-half sub. Five days later versus Chile in Santiago he was selected in the starting XI alongside Conor, who'd arrived late on the trip having helped Fleetwood Town to promotion from League Two via the play-offs.

Ryan, aged 19, is the younger by three school years. Conor made his international debut in 2011 when Italy were the opponents in a qualifier for the European Championships the following year. Both are right-backs, although Conor has played centrally for Fleetwood. "Let me see, who was playing for Italy that night…" Conor tries to remember before looking across the room directly at Ryan. "Buffon…Pirlo…Cassano…" He pauses. "The calibre wasn't too bad was it?" Again Ryan responds, citing that his own arrival came against the South American champions before a man-of-the-match performance against Chile. "Ryan says the score was nil-nil when he went off with 15 minutes or so to go," Conor reasons. "But I think it had more to do with Alexis Sanchez coming on at the same time."

"We've been like this since we were kids," Ryan continues. "It has been good preparation because if you're going to survive at a football club, you have to be quick-minded. You have to be able to take the stick and give it back too. It builds up your character."

After playing together for Northern Ireland, the reaction back home was typically humbling. Parents Colm and Moya were inwardly proud. Friends said little. "We've got the same group of mates and they give us stick about it. It's always been the way," adds Ryan. "I remember coming back from the pre-season tour with Liverpool a few years ago where I'd marked Francesco Totti. I was buzzing. But all the lads did was give me stick. It's great. It keeps you grounded. The only thing they ask is: who played better? Naturally, I'd say it was me and Conor would say it was him."

Since childhood, the only time Ryan and Conor had appeared in the same team together was for Northern Ireland's Under-21 side two years ago. Both admit they did not believe it would happen again. Shortly after, Conor was released by Preston North End following an injury and he soon signed for Fleetwood, then in the fourth tier of English football. Now, they are the second set of brothers in



Ryan celebrates a goal for the Under-21s











Training at the LFC Academy

Northern Ireland's set-up, competing with Johnny and Corey Evans of Manchester United and Blackburn Rovers respectively. "We're both delighted to be playing because it's a sign that we're both doing okay in our careers," Ryan says. "But in terms of us playing together, we don't see it as a big deal. At the end of the day, you have to play well and help the team. That's the most important thing."

Growing up in the west end of Belfast, Conor remembers Ryan wanting to test himself, playing football with older boys. "We'd finish school and get dragged in at 10pm. It was competitive with loads of lads taking part. We'd use two gates at either end of the street and have a big match."

Gaelic football, played in school, was another sport. "You have to learn to dodge the tackles and release possession quickly," Ryan says. "Otherwise you're going to get a whack. The same skills apply in football so it benefited me in the long run. I also tried hurling until the age of 13 when I got absolutely flattened one day, knocked out. I've never played since because I didn't want it to stop me playing football."

The McLaughlins followed the same path as David Healy (Northern Ireland's record goalscorer), Aaron Hughes and Johnny Evans in representing their county team Antrim and prestigious boys club Lisburn Youth before English clubs came calling. Conor had moved onto Linfield ahead of being asked to trial with Preston in 2008 while Ryan was initially spotted by a Liverpool scout, playing in the Milk Cup for Antrim. "It was my first experience of being a real footballer, being put up in a hotel, training every day – making sure you recover properly in between games. It was the best week of my life. We played Everton and lost 3-2. Ross Barkley was in their side."

Ryan decided to join Liverpool ahead of Manchester City but only after he'd completed his GCSEs. By then, he was also playing for Glenavon. "I was a real home-bird at the time and was a bit scared about moving away. I also wanted to make sure there was something to fall back on if it went wrong. So I carried on at school and got an A, four Bs and five Cs."

Before settling permanently on Merseyside, Ryan travelled to LFC's academy in Kirkby frequently, training with other young players at weekends. "At first I didn't say a word to anyone. Everybody else seemed so confident and then there was me. Phil Roscoe [the head of education and welfare]

"In Gaelic football we learned to dodge the tackles or get a whack"

says he's never seen a transformation as rapid. I love it here now and the family is over here all the time."

Ryan has since represented the Reds at every level, beginning this campaign by scoring the U21s' winning goal at Sunderland. He finished last season on loan at Barnsley in the Championship.

"Even though we got relegated, it was invaluable. You really learn what three points means because you can see the reaction of the crowd in the stadium. You can hear the people cheer when you do something right, and equally the groans when you do something wrong. It's about reacting to all of that in the right way. Hopefully it's something I'll experience again in the future."



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ALEX INGLETHORPE: ACADEMY DIRECTOR

Alex Inglethorpe's new role as Academy Director will see him involved in a variety of different areas. "I'm very definite that one of my strengths is as a coach and I really enjoyed being in charge of the Under-21s last season," he explains.

"This new title means that although I won't be manager of the 21s, I'll still be working with them plus the U19s and all the other age-groups right down to the very youngest players. For example, I went with the U19s to the Otten Cup in Holland [an annual friendly youth tournament] to work with Neil Critchley. I might go somewhere else with the U21s or U18s."

His responsibilities don't end there. "Part of the job is to be on hand for the coaches as well. We have a lot of talented guys working with our teams and I try to mentor them. I'll also be helping with recruitment of players. The Academy is a fantastic environment but we felt it needed some updating and the recent changes infrastructure are part of that. Being director obviously means busy days but it's a very enjoyable job and I'm fortunate to have an understanding wife and family."

When identifying youngsters who might play at the highest level at some point is not an easy task. Inglethorpe says it's not just about ability. "We want independent, free-thinking players that can adapt as they get older. For me the most interesting aspect of the first team going so close to winning the title last season was the fact that they used six or maybe seven different formations. We recognise the style of that team is not necessarily wrapped around one formation or way of playing, so we have to produce players who can be flexible.

"As well as that, they have to be players who can perform in the style of the club. That means they have to try to have more of the ball than the opposition – be creative, attack and provide entertainment. That's what the Anfield crowd demands and rightly so."

Progressing up through the ranks to the first team is a huge challenge for any youngster at a Barclays Premier League club. In a lot of cases they simply don't get the opportunity to impress at senior level.

"We really want free thinkers who can perform in the style of the club"

Inglethorpe feels that isn't the situation at Liverpool. "I think if you are one of our young players there is more than a glimmer of hope that you'll get a chance [with the first team]. There are lads such as Raheem Sterling and Jon Flanagan who have done it already. There's also Joao Teixeira who spent some weeks training at Melwood and then made his debut away at Fulham. Brad Smith also appeared as a sub away at Chelsea. So those kind of



EMY:

the teams

Six key figures talk exclusively about the recent exciting changes at Kirkby

NICK MARSHALL: HEAD OF ACADEMY FOOTBALL OPERATIONS

Nick Marshall has a wealth of experience in youth coaching and joins the club after a year working as a coach mentor with the FA. He was academy manager at Nottingham Forest for 14 years, helping produce internationals such as Michael Dawson, Jermaine Jenas and Andy Reid. He's also worked at Barnsley and Leeds United.

"I had spent 20 years in club football and wasn't looking to leave the FA but you don't turn down this club," he says. "My role will be to assist Alex and the staff, particularly across our coaching. We want to make sure that the theories and principles of the first-team manager are put into practice and rolled out across all the age-groups.

"It's more about the principles of what makes Liverpool, Liverpool, rather than particular formations or systems. It's producing players who can fit into that and work out the answers to problems themselves.

"I won't be taking a team as we have very good coaches here already. I'm here to help them. Like Alex, I want to have a wider view of everything."

Nick will also help supplement the fixture schedule across all age-groups. "I don't think a games programme provided by an outside source is ever going to ideally suit the needs of an individual club. One of my jobs is to make sure we supplement the games programme with another one to make sure that our players get the best possible opportunities to progress.

"Alex has always been keen on tournaments being a big part of what we do and that's the way I feel too. Going away to tournaments or playing in one-off games against opposition where it means something, you can't stress how important that is for players' long-term development, particularly if they're going to be playing for a club that is hopefully challenging in the Champions League each year."



examples prove the manager is willing to give young lads a chance, even in important games."

The fact that Brendan Rodgers spent the early part of his coaching career working in youth development at both Reading and Chelsea is a major factor in how he treats young players, Inglethorpe believes. "It's not just Brendan. There's also Colin Pascoe, Mike Marsh and John Achterberg who have all been involved in developmental football. So they have a great understanding of what we are trying to do. That's definitely not the case at every club. It's hugely encouraging that the first-team staff know the name of all of the young lads and are very aware of how they are progressing and what they need to do to improve. To know that the players will get a chance if they are good enough is a great motivation for all of us at the Academy."

Producing players who can add something to a squad that accumulated 84 points and scored over a century of goals on the way to finishing second in 2013/14 is quite a challenge.

"Definitely," Inglethorpe agrees. "But what a great challenge to have. The way the first team play is superb and that's the way we want all of our sides to perform. The type of football they regularly produce is what our vision and philosophy is all about.

"Part of my job is to make sure that philosophy is implemented in every age-group. We also look at how the first team have, through coaching, developed and improved the players in the squad over the last few years. Again, that's something we always want to do."

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MICHAEL BEALE: UNDER-21S COACH

Michael replaces Alex Inglethorpe as Under-21 boss after two years with the Under-15s/16s. There, his focus was to find scholarships – at Liverpool or elsewhere – for youngsters upon leaving school, something which often saw him taking on seven-day weeks as he combined his role with a coaching position alongside his predecessor.

The hard labour has reaped its rewards though, as he explains: "In the last two years we've managed to get every boy who didn't get a scholarship at Liverpool one elsewhere. It's a fantastic achievement for any kid leaving school. One thing I'm massive with is the after-care of our players. People talk about a football club being a family but I believe Liverpool can actually lay claim to it."

Prior to coaching, the Londoner had a brief playing career with Charlton Athletic. Then, after spells in the United States and at Rushden & Diamonds, he was handed a part-time coaching role with Chelsea's Under-6s.

He spent 10 years with the Blues, going full-time in 2006, and worked his way up to U14s level before moving to Merseyside in August 2012. He struck up a fine working relationship with Brendan Rodgers at Stamford Bridge, but the Ulsterman had little to do with Michael's move north. "It was a coincidence that I came to Liverpool and Brendan was the manager. I was a huge Kenny Dalglish fan as a kid, and the opportunity to come when he was manager was fantastic. That summer he lost his job and I was thinking: 'oh no.' But Brendan got it and it was a lovely coincidence."

Michael adds: "I'm in regular contact with Brendan, (Mike) Marshie, John Achterberg and Colin Pascoe because they come down to see us. They know all the players' names and that's a big asset. It gives the boys hope.

"Our job is to get the boys good enough to do what Raheem and Flano did last year, which is make a huge impact on the first team. Our team is primarily Under-19 and therefore we're lucky enough to have the U19s Champions League as well this season. We don't want the programme to be driven by games – we want it to be driven by development."

Some of those U19s will feature in Beale's squads this season, with the more experienced second/third-year scholars encouraged to gather first-team experience on loan – Rafael Paez, Joao Teixeira and Brad Smith are current examples of that policy.



PEP LIJNDERS: UNDER-16S COACH



Dutchman Pep joins the Reds after gaining plenty of experience working at PSV Eindhoven and FC Porto. He moved into coaching as a teenager after a serious knee injury ended his hopes of a top-flight playing career.

"I spent the last seven years at FC Porto as director of individual player development," he says. "I worked with all age-groups from the little ones through to the second team. It was hard to step away from FC Porto but there were three factors in my decision: this is the right club, the right moment and I will be working alongside the right people.

"It is the right club because there are not many others in Europe who have a bigger tradition and history than the likes of FC Porto but Liverpool is certainly one of them.

"It is the right moment because with the ideas of the first-team manager Brendan Rodgers I believe that we have exciting times ahead.

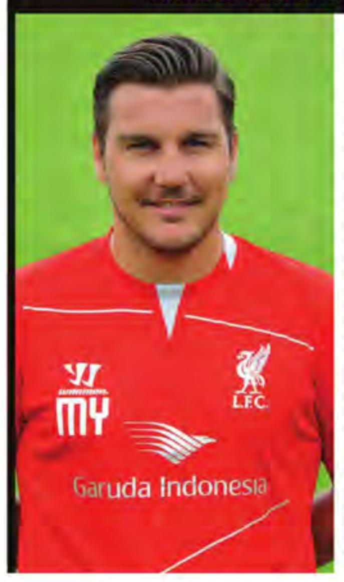
"And I am convinced we have the right people here. Once we started discussions, I felt that with Alex, Nick, Critch (Under-18s coach Neil Critchley) and others we don't only have top coaches, we have top people who think about the long-term not just the here and now."

Pep is eager to get started is his new role. "I'm excited about the challenge of working with the Under-16s and honoured that I can represent the colours and the tradition of this great football club.

"This is a big challenge for all of us here at the Academy to create a new generation of Liverpool players who can not only play in our first team but win prizes with our first team."

"We want to create a new generation of top Liverpool players"

MICHAEL YATES: HEAD OF UNDER-6S TO UNDER-9S



Michael's association with Liverpool began as an eight-year-old when he was asked by scouts to train with the club at sessions held in Litherland High School's gymnasium.

"There were two sites back then," he recalls. "Steven Gerrard, Jamie Carragher and Michael Owen were based at the Vernon Sangster playing fields which used to be situated next to Anfield. During the summer holidays we'd be allowed into Melwood and all train there. It was a brilliant time."

Yates was released by Liverpool aged 18 but returned to the professional game within 18 months with Dundee in the Scottish Premier League following a productive goalscoring spell at Burscough. He became a coach in 2001 and under the guidance of Steve Heighway, helped develop Liverpool's players aged between 10 and 13.

After four years as a programme manager for the LFC International Academy, he was appointed in his new role earlier this summer. He has now been involved at Liverpool FC for 23 years. "I can remember all the things I was told as a kid – important lessons in life. Just the basics like zipping your tracksuit up and making sure your boots are clean. They stay with you forever. If you play for Liverpool you should always look smart and act in a way that reflects the traditions of the club."

Yates considers it important that the children under his guidance develop not just skills but their understanding of Liverpool FC's history. "When the kids are as young as they are, its about the experience – having fun, as well as teaching them the right things on and off the pitch. It's about giving them values and introducing to them how special the football club is. Once they realise that, I don't see why they'd go anywhere else."

He is excited by what is happening at Liverpool currently. "There is a clear pathway between the age-groups. Every coach at Liverpool is working towards the same goal. Ultimately that means providing footballers for the next level."

"At this age it's about having fun and learning the right things"

ANDREW POWLESLAND: HEAD OF ACADEMY BUSINESS OPERATIONS



former professional basketball player and coach, Andrew has joined Liverpool FC from London South Bank University where he was director of sport.

He will ensure the Academy runs efficiently and will be responsible for facilities and operations, including coordinating support services such as welfare, education, human resources and administration.

"I've had quite a bit of senior experience in education but it's always been with a sporting focus," he explains. "I know what it's like to be a professional sportsman having played basketball for Crystal Palace, Derby and Plymouth Raiders and I have also coached at a high level [leading Brixton Topcats to National Cup victory in 2010].

"I've also coached the England Universities' representative team so I think part of my recruitment to this role is my ability to combine my educational and business experience with an ability to speak to coaches, sports scientists, strength-and-conditioning coaches and bring things together.

"My role is to support what we do on the pitch. I will be looking at the way we do things and provide a management oversight of the infrastructure that supports that: looking at possible future facility-builds and so on.

"The Academy is a big operation with a great footballing heart and does it's job admirably well, but we have to think of the future too and how we want to help support the numbers coming through here in the years ahead."

"My role is to help support what we do on the pitch at the Academy"





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How my own loan move led to the greatest football night of my career

Neil MELLOR



As you will read in [new Under-21s coach] Michael Beale's interview elsewhere in this issue of the magazine, there is an aim this season to find the right loan move for the club's second and third-year scholars at the academy.

This is really significant as it proves Liverpool are keen to develop individuals rather than teams. In the short term it might be at the expense of match results but in the long-term, it will improve the standard of the players being produced at senior level.

I have mentioned before in this column that finding the right type of loan move is crucial to a player's development. Six months before I scored a goal and provided an assist in that famous encounter with Olympiacos in the Champions League group stages, I was knocking about on the substitutes bench at Championship level.

I played 21 times for West Ham. Before joining them for the 2003/04 season, I envisaged playing more. There were other valuable lessons learnt in the loan, though. At academy level you are cossetted from the realities of professional football to a certain extent because you don't really feel the value of three points: what it really means to the club's fans, the manager, the staff and the whole squad. It helps you grow up both on and off the pitch, even if you aren't starting every game.

That experience certainly helped me in the campaign that followed. It was a remarkable period. I was in and out of the team but had moments that I will carry for the rest of my life. On 23 November I started in the team that lost in AS Monaco, a result that left us on the verge of elimination from the Champions League. Five days later,

"Just six months before that goal I was on the subs bench at West Ham"



Neil Mellor scores v Olympiacos – game on!

I scored an injury-time winner against the champions Arsenal from 30 yards in front of the Kop. Within two weeks, Olympiacos happened. There were so many ups and downs in a short period. That's what football's about.

Supporters might think that because the Arsenal goal won the match and a lot of the focus afterwards was on me, I remember it with greater fondness. Yet Olympiacos was better. Every Liverpool fan who is old enough remembers where he or she was when David Fairclough scored the winner against Saint Etienne in 1977. The same applies to the younger generation where Olympiacos is concerned.

What happened before Steven Gerrard's strike is a bit of a blur. Rivaldo scored to give them the lead in the first half. After Florent Sinama-Pongolle scrambled in our first just after the break, Rafa Benitez introduced me with 12 minutes remaining. It felt like the final roll of the dice. Within two minutes I'd forced one over the line, meaning we needed just one more goal to seal progression. It still felt unlikely.

I think Jamie Carragher hoisted a pass forward and I could see Stevie rushing forward from deep. I tried my best to touch it onto his path and seconds later the ball was nestling in the back of the net.

I wanted to join in the celebrations but Stevie's momentum from the shot took him charging towards the Kop. Eventually I managed to catch up with him. The atmosphere was the best I've been involved in. The roar was deafening. I couldn't hear what other people were telling me from a few yards away. I remember those seconds clearly. I always will do. We were through.

This season should provide the opportunity for the players to make lasting memories of their own in the Champions League. Having been out of the competition for a while and with a young squad, a lot of people have dismissed Liverpool chances of doing well.

Then again, similar comments were made about the class of 2004/05. And look where that ended.

Follow Neil on Twitter @NeilMellor33

Meet the Shanklys

Former Reds junior player Vic Gill recalls how he joined the Shankly clan

Q Bill Shankly played for Liverpool as a wartime guest but wasn't his son-in-law Victor Gill also on LFC's books?

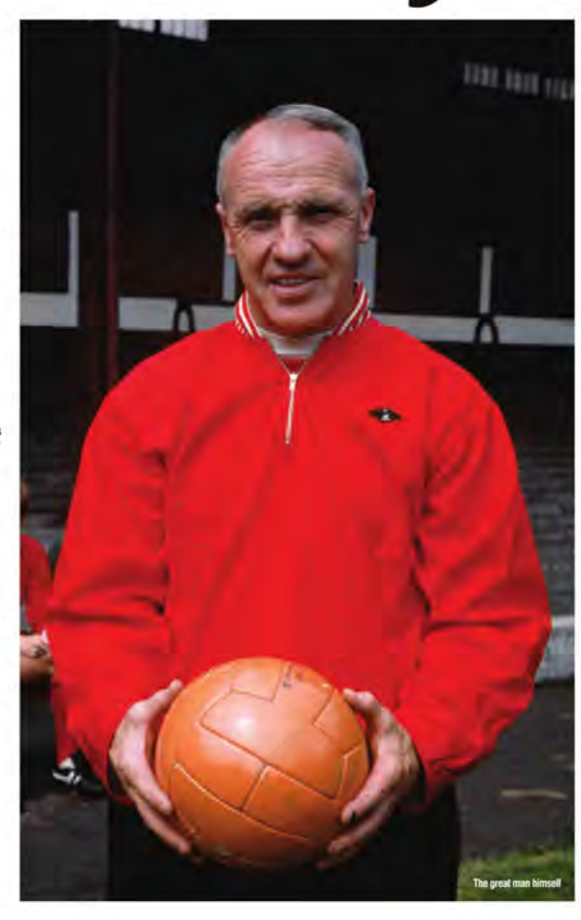
A "We have stats detailing Victor playing in youth matches between 1958/59 and 1960/61," says Jonny Stokkeland of the Liverpool FC Official Archives. "He would've trained with players like Tommy Lawrence, Ian Callaghan, Tommy Smith and Roger Hunt."

Victor Gill was born at the Royal Liverpool Infirmary at the height of the Second World War on 7 August 1943. His family had arrived in Liverpool from Cork in southern Ireland and settled in Norris Green then a council house on the newly-built Cantril Farm estate in 1947.

"I moved to Cantril Farm County Primary School in Mab Lane and it was here that my love of football was born," he says. "When I was old enough to be considered for the school team I was soon made captain, scored lots of goals and we won the league."

Vic moved to Old Swan Secondary Technical School where the game consumed him. "I would think about playing at Anfield. One time our English teacher asked us to write an essay on what we wanted to be when we left school. Other lads wrote about being engineers, scientists, draughtsmen, architects, but I wrote about being a professional footballer – playing in front of thousands every week, scoring the winning goal in the FA Cup final, playing for England and earning £20 per week!"

"When I first joined LFC I even tried tried to walk like Billy Liddell!"



The great man himself



Vic and Barbara's wedding

His skills saw him selected for the Liverpool Schoolboys team and he scored more than 80 goals in a season for the Boys Brigade. In early 1957 a dream came true.

"I received a letter inviting me to go for trials to Liverpool FC. I had received other offers of trials from Everton, Oldham, Bolton and Preston, but there was only one club for me. I turned up at Melwood a very nervous boy. There were about 100 boys there, mostly older and bigger than me. After about 10 minutes the nerves had gone and I was really enjoying it as I knew I was playing well. I still get little flashbacks of the game today.

"As we left the pitch Bob Paisley asked me if I would like to sign. He explained that I would be the second youngest player ever to sign for Liverpool, the youngest being Ray Lambert. After all those years going to Anfield to watch my heroes playing, I was now part of the same club. I even tried to walk like Billy Liddell!"

The Reds were then in the Second Division and the junior teams were overseen by Tom Bush. "In 1959 Phil Taylor left as manager and one evening I was in the toilets at Melwood when this guy with training kit stood next to me. I thought: blimey, they're signing some old players. In a broad Scottish accent he asked how old I was. We went out onto the pitch together and did a few laps chatting away and he seemed quite a nice bloke. Eli Wass, the groundsman, told me: 'That's the new boss, Bill Shankly'.

"The following week we were playing a midweek match at Blackpool. In the team that night were Tommy Lawrence, Tommy Smith, Ian Callaghan, Willie Carlin, Frank Twist. While we were changing, Tom Bush said: 'The new boss is coming to watch and he's going to say a few words before you go out'. This was

"A girl watched us playing tennis – her name was Barbara Shankly"

quite a surprise because in the previous two years we'd rarely seen Phil Taylor or spoken to him. Bill Shankly came in and said: 'Ok lads, keep it simple and pass to a red shirt'. We did and won 3-2."

However as Vic got older he took a shine to the city's music scene and developed an interest in the opposite sex. After leaving school he worked as an apprentice fitter near Liverpool Airport. "I would sometimes turn up for a game not having slept all night. The coaches noticed that I wasn't playing my usual game and then my name disappeared from the team sheets.

"During the summer of 1962 I waited in vain for a letter telling me to report for pre-season training. It was all over for me at Liverpool. I started the next season with Winsford United. I floated around non-league for a few years and earned a few bob on top of my wages. When I look back now I wish I'd had the dedication and self discipline to take the chance that was offered to me at Liverpool."

Little did he know it but Vic would still have more encounters with Bill Shankly – as his son-in-law! "I had a particular mate during my time at Liverpool called Bobby Oldham who lived next door to Everton's training ground in Bellefield Avenue, where the Shankly family also lived. Bobby and I would occasionally play head tennis in the entrance to Bellefield and sometimes this young girl would come and watch. We chatted and she told us her name was Barbara Shankly.

"I met her again in a club in West Derby Village and we would have a dance and a coffee and sometimes I would walk her home. By the time I was 21 and Barbara 18, our relationship was very serious. I asked her to marry me. Mr and Mrs Shankly gave their approval and a date was set for summer 1965."

Before the wedding Vic had occasion to fear the full force of Bill's ire. "In December 1964 I went to the house and Mrs Shankly told me Barbara was pregnant. Liverpool had a game at Stoke the following day so Mr Shankly wasn't there. I turned up at the Shankly home the next evening not knowing what to expect. After the meal Mrs Shankly broke the news and there was an ominous silence. He paced up and down and I was waiting for a punch in the back of my head. Then he said: 'Well, it happens in the best of families.' I was shocked but relieved.

"Later he told me Mrs Shankly was having difficulty with the fact that we were having a church wedding and that Barbara would walk down the aisle in a white dress. He said that if we cancelled the church wedding and had a register-office ceremony instead, he would give us the deposit on any house of our choosing. Eventually Barbara agreed. We found a lovely three-bedroom terrace off Queens Drive, 10 minutes from the Shankly home. Mr Shankly paid the deposit, £450, and I got a mortgage for the rest at £14 per month over 25 years."

Can you help?

Vic Gill would love to hear from old LFC juniors team-mates Bobby Oldham, Stan Woodall and John Manning. They can contact Vic via lfcmag@programmemaster.com.

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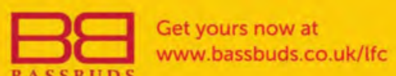
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THE MONTH AHEAD

SEPT

Derby day is dawning

The first Merseyside derby of the season takes place on Saturday 27 September with the Reds looking to repeat last season's home win over Everton. It will be the first time since the 2002/03 season that the first meeting of the two sides has taken place at Anfield.

Last term Liverpool ran out convincing 4-0 winners with a Daniel Sturridge double book-ended by goals from Steven Gerrard and Luis Suarez. The Blues have strengthened their squad during the summer with big-name signings such as Romelu Lukaku and Samuel Eto'o as well as midfield men Gareth Barry and Muhamed Besic.

The month's other home league date sees the Reds host Aston Villa on 13 September. Last term Villa held Brendan Rodgers' men, securing a point from a 2-2 draw. Other Anfield action during the month will see Championship side Middlesbrough make their first visit since August 2008 when the Reds start their Capital One Cup campaign against Aitor Karanka's side. Boro reached round three with a 3-1 victory over Preston North End.





BIRTHDAY REDS

Scott Carson 29 on 3 Sept
Markus Babbel 42 on 8 Sept
John Arne Riise 34 on 24 Sept
Stephane Henchoz 40 on 7 Sept
Luis Alberto 22 on 28 Sept
Ronnie Whelan 53 on 25 Sept
David Thompson 37 on 12 Sept
Kevin Lewis 74 on 19 Sept
Phil Boersma 65 on 24 Sept
Harry Kewell 36 on 22 Sept
John Aldridge 56 on 18 Sept
Alun Evans 65 on 30 Sept
Daniel Sturridge 25 on 1 Sept
Karlheinz Riedle 49 on 16 Sept
Jerome Sinclair 18 on 20 Sept



Anniversaries

25 years ago since the Reds beat Crystal Palace 9-0 on 12 September
33 years since Ian Rush scored his first goal for LFC on 30 September
36 years since the famous 7-0 win over Tottenham on 2 September
40 years since the club's record victory – 11-0 v Stromsgodset in the ECWC on 17 September
50 years since the Reds defeated KR Rejkyavik in their first European tie at Anfield on 14 September
102 years since LFC signed the great Elisha Scott on 3 September

Paisley show at the Pavilion

The 40th anniversary of Bob Paisley's appointment as Liverpool manager is being celebrated on stage. Respected author and broadcaster John Keith, the man behind the popular *Shankly Show*, has written a brand new stage show which premieres at New Brighton's Floral Pavilion.

The curtain goes up on *Bob Paisley: Reluctant Genius* on Friday 12 September and will feature four of Paisley's legendary players live on stage: Ian Callaghan, Jimmy Case, Phil Neal and Alan Kennedy.

"Bob did a fantastic job following Bill Shankly, winning a phenomenal collection of trophies, and we're all delighted to be a part of show that pays due tribute to what he achieved," says Cally.

Tickets for the show, which features rolling images of Bob and an enthralling collection of audio clips, are available now priced £15 (£12 concessions) by calling 0151 666 0000, visiting www.floralpavilion.com or in person at the theatre box office.





Hammers time

Liverpool head to Upton Park to take on West Ham on 20 September. Brendan Rodgers's men will be aiming for a repeat of last season's success against Sam Allardyce's men: two Steven Gerrard penalties secured a 2-1 win back in April. Among the Hammers' summer signings are strikers Enner Valencia, Mauro Zarate and Diafra Sakho.

Sam Allardyce's side started the season with a 1-0 home defeat at the hands of Tottenham but bounced back with a 3-1 win at Crystal Palace in their second league game thanks to goals from Zarate, Carlton Cole and ex-Red Stewart Downing.

BLUES DATE FOR LADIES

Liverpool Ladies face a key clash at fellow FA WSL title hopefuls Birmingham City on Sunday 21 September. The two teams played out a 1-1 draw at Widnes in May but the Reds, who entered September second in the standings, know they will need to secure a victory if they are to achieve their aim of retaining the crown. The fixture will take place at the Autotech Stadium in Solihull (kick-off 2pm).



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Rafa relives the glory of 2004/05

The return of Champions League football and a Merseyside derby triple-header are just some of the highlights on LFC TV during what promises to be an exciting September.

As the season gets into full swing the club's official TV channel goes from strength to strength. After a five-year absence the Reds are back in the Continent's elite competition and ahead of that first game we'll set the scene with a number of new shows.

From our studio in Chapel Street *Reds in Europe* will be coming to your screens at the start of every Champions League week. In it we'll be looking ahead to the games and celebrating our rich European heritage.

This year marks half-a-century since the club's first-ever competitive game in Europe and to commemorate such a significant anniversary *Liverpool's Euro Top 50* will count through what we deem to have been our most memorable European matches.

It's also ten seasons since our fifth Champions League triumph and Rafael Benitez, the man who steered us to glory, will be taking centre stage in *The Road To Istanbul*, an exclusive new series in which our former boss re-lives each game and talks in-depth about how the Reds defied the odds to claim club football's greatest prize.

Domestically there's also plenty happening. Games don't come much bigger than the Merseyside derby and local pride is at stake for the Ladies, Under-21s and first team in September. For the best coverage stay tuned to the channel.

LFCTV is available on Sky channel 429 or Virgin channel 544. For full up-to-date listings visit **www.liverpoolfc.com/lfctv/whats-on-when**.

And don't forget for on demand access to all the team's goals, highlights, live reserve and Under-18 games, news and exclusive video interviews there's **LFC TV Go**. For more information visit **www.liverpoolfc.com/video**.



SEASON TICKET HOLDERS

As a Season Ticket Holder there will be times when you cannot make it to a Barclays Premier League home match due to holidays or other commitments. If so, don't let your seat go empty and lose out on the opportunity to receive credit against the cost of your Season Ticket next summer.

Use the online Ticket Exchange service to release your ticket. You can use this service as many times as you want during the season. For more information regarding the Ticket Exchange please visit: www.liverpoolfc.com/tickets/ticket-exchange.



FIXTURE LIST 2014/2015

AUGUST
- 17 **Southampton** (H) **2-1**
- 25 **Manchester City** (A) 1-3
- 31 **Tottenham Hotspur** (A)

SEPTEMBER
- 13 **Aston Villa** (H, 5.30pm)
- 16 **PFC Ludogorets 1945 (H, UCL)**
- 20 **West Ham United** (A, 5.30pm)
- 23 **Middlesbrough (H, 7.45pm COC 3)**
- 27 **Everton** (H, 12.45pm)

OCTOBER
- 1 **FC Basel 1893 (A, UCL)**
- 4 **West Bromwich Albion** (H, 3pm)
- 19 **Queens Park Rangers** (A, 1.30pm)
- 22 **Real Madrid (H, UCL)**
- 25 **Hull City** (H, 3pm)
- 29 **Capital One Cup** fourth round

NOVEMBER
- 1 **Newcastle United** (A, 12.45pm)
- 4 **Real Madrid (A, UCL)**
- 8 **Chelsea** (H, 12.45pm)
- 23 **Crystal Palace** (A, 1.30pm)
- 26 **PFC Ludogorets 1945 (A, UCL)**
- 29 **Stoke City** (H)

DECEMBER
- 2 **Leicester City** (A, 8pm)
- 6 **Sunderland** (H)
- 9 **FC Basel 1893 (H, UCL)**
- 13 **Manchester United** (A)
- 17 **Capital One Cup** fifth round
- 20 **Arsenal** (H)
- 26 **Burnley** (A)
- 28 **Swansea City** (H)

JANUARY
- 1 **Leicester City** (H)
- 3 **FA Cup** third round
- 10 **Sunderland** (A)
- 17 **Aston Villa** (A)
- 21 **Capital One Cup** semi-final first leg
- 24 **FA Cup** fourth round
- 28 **Capital One Cup** semi-final second leg
- 31 **West Ham United** (H)

FEBRUARY
- 7 **Everton** (A)
- 10 **Tottenham Hotspur** (H)
- 14 **FA Cup fifth round**
- 17/18 **Champions League** round of 16 (1)
- 21 **Southampton** (A)
- 24/25 **Champions League** round of 16 (2)
- 28 **Manchester City** (H)

MARCH
- 1 **Capital One Cup** final
- 3 **Burnley** (H)
- 7 **FA Cup** quarter-finals
- 14 **Swansea City** (A)
- 21 **Manchester United** (H)

APRIL
- 4 **Arsenal** (A)
- 11 **Newcastle United** (H)
- 4/15 **Champions League** quarter-finals (1)
- 18 **Hull City** (A) / **FA Cup** semi-finals
- 21/22 **Champions League** quarter-finals (2)
- 25 **West Bromwich Albion** (A)

MAY
- 2 **Queens Park Rangers** (H)
- 5/6 **Champions Lge** semi-finals (1)
- 9 **Chelsea** (A)
- 12/13 **Champions Lge** semi-finals (2)
- 16 **Crystal Palace** (H)
- 24 **Stoke City** (A)
- 30 **FA Cup** final

JUNE
- 6 **Champions Leage** final

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NON-LEAGUE DAY: GET INVOLVED!



Marine AFC photo by Susan Nugent

Spawned as a social-media experiment four years ago, Non-League Day is now a fully established part of the football calendar. Taking place only on international breaks – this year's is on 6 September – it provides a platform for clubs to promote the importance of affordable volunteer-led community football while giving fans across the country the chance to show support for their local non-league side.

It's an attractive proposition for any Barclays Premier League or Championship fan, or indeed Leagues One and Two if you can't make it to your team's game.

In the pick of the local fixtures Crosby outfit Marine take on FC United of Manchester. Like last season, Marine are offering discounted entry at the Arriva Stadium to those in possession of Liverpool, Everton, Tranmere Rovers and now AFC Liverpool season-tickets. Chairman Paul Leary says: "This is another great way for Merseyside football fans who already have season tickets at Everton, Liverpool or Tranmere Rovers to adopt Marine as their second team."

Also in the region, Cammell Laird take on Litherland REMYCA, while Chester FC host Macclesfield Town in the Vanarama Conference.

I'M SUPPORTING NON LEAGUE DAY 06.09.14
www.nonleagueday.co.uk

Prostate Cancer UK will be the official charity partner of Non-League Day 2014. Its *Men United v Prostate Cancer* campaign has already seen them build an important relationship with the Football League and UK director of fundraising Mark Bishop says: "We have embarked on a very deliberate way of using football as a way of talking to men about this killer disease."

You can find out more at **www.nonleagueday.co.uk.**



Working with children and adults to help inspire positive change through sport – follow us on Twitter **@LFCFoundation** to keep up to date with the community team's projects and activities

Some of the winners at the Respect 4 All event

A night for winners

The Reds Lounge at Anfield recently played host to an extra-special awards evening

The achievements of children and adults from Liverpool FC Foundation's disability sports programme, Respect 4 All, have been celebrated at a special event at Anfield.

More than 40 players were joined by their coaches, family and friends in the Reds Lounge at Anfield for their end-of-season awards ceremony.

Based at St Margaret's CE School in Aigburth and Woodchurch High School in Wirral, the programme delivers free impairment-specific multi-sport classes to more than 150 children and adults every week. The classes run four nights a week during school term time, catering for children and adults with severe learning difficulties, visual and physical impairment (ambulant) and wheelchair users. Project lead Ryan Moignard said: "I am so proud of all our Respect for All participants this year – their hard work has been exemplary. It's very important for everyone to celebrate their achievements with their friends and family and share their success."

Running for over 12 years, the Foundation's disability programme is one of its flagship initiatives. As well as Respect 4 All, it includes two Ability Counts centres in Aigburth and the Wirral. Ability Counts staged its own very special event at Anfield the previous week.

BELFAST VISIT

The Foundation with youngsters in Northern Ireland

"More than 250 people took part in Belfast"

Liverpool FC Foundation was in Belfast recently to deliver cross-community football coaching sessions to more than 250 young people.

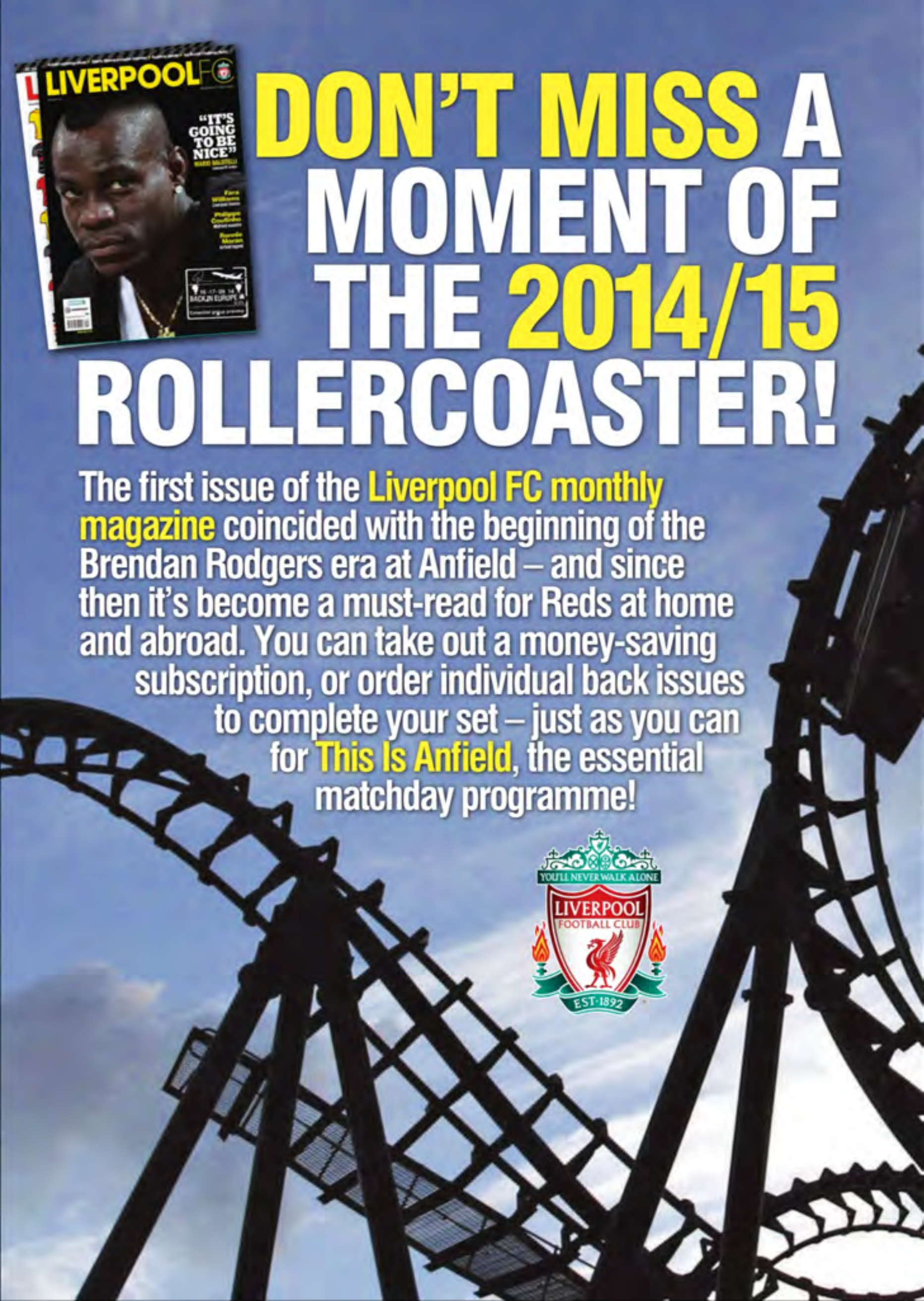
Six community coaches travelled across the Irish Sea and worked across various venues in Cookstown and Belfast. Mark Haig, head of operations at the Foundation, said: "Our qualified coaches delivered fun, challenging coaching sessions to help engage hundreds of local youngsters in sport and taught them to play 'the Liverpool Way'."

PRIDE OF LIVERPOOL



LFC representatives with GFSN members at Liverpool Pride

The club showed its support at this year's Liverpool Pride festival with members of staff, Liverpool Ladies and the Foundation Ambassadors all taking part in the march across the city. Liverpool FC representatives marched alongside Everton Toffees and the Gay Football Supporters Network in celebration of the city's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community. Thousands of people took part in this year's event and the theme of 'Glam Fairy Tales' created some fantastic and memorable costumes. There were also performances from the likes of Katy B and Heather Small and many more artists.


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6 Shankly Tee (black)
£15.00 (A3475)



7 Block Tee (grey)
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LFC ICE BUCKET CHALLENGE!



Brendan Rodgers



Steven Gerrard



Jamie Carragher



Gemma Davison



Luis Garcia



Martin Skrtel



Daniel Sturridge



Lucas



Jon Flanagan



Jan Molby



Javier Manquillo



Mario Balotelli

The ice bucket challenge was launched to raise funds and awareness for ALS, the American name for the condition usually referred to in the United Kingdom as Motor Neurone Disease (MND). Liverpool manager Brendan Rodgers was nominated by former semi-professional footballer and Reds fan Mark Maddox who is living with MND and campaigning to raise awareness. A feature with Mark will appear in next month's magazine.

David PRICE

LFC can benefit from the end of Steven's amazing England career



The skipper says goodbye to England

When Roy Hodgson's England team went away at the start of September for their international games against Norway and Switzerland, a familiar face was missing.

Steven Gerrard has been a brilliant servant for his country since 2000 and one of an elite band of players to wear the Three Lions shirt more than 100 times. His talent and experience will be much missed by England and announcing his retirement from international football was clearly a tough decision.

From a Liverpool fan's perspective however, it is undeniably good news. If the majority of Liverpool supporters had it their way, they would have wrapped Steven up in cotton wool a long time ago. They would never have let him go and play for England at all so that we could have had him all to ourselves.

"He's been such a brilliant servant for his country over the years"

The reality is that he's an athlete and a sportsman and he naturally wanted to represent his country. He's captained England and won 114 caps which is a massive thing for a footballer.

To pull those Three Lions over your head is an incredible sensation. I had the same feeling as a boxer at the Commonwealth Games [David captained the England boxing team in Melbourne in 2006 and of course won a gold medal] and you feel a massive sense of pride in representing your country. It's something that money can't buy and Steven is not going to have that feeling any more, so he's no doubt had to agonise over that reality.

But at 34 years of age, I think it's the right decision. There's still quite a long time until the next major tournament and I think what he needs to enjoy his football in the twilight years of his career.

All in all, last season was one of his best. He played loads of games and was part of a team that was challenging for the title. Hopefully this season things will work out even better. Liverpool will certainly benefit from the captain being able to concentrate solely on his club football.

It was great to start the season with a win against Southampton at Anfield and after the tough visit to the Etihad in Manchester that followed, hopefully the team can build a solid foundation for the Premier League campaign. This month will also see the return of the club to the UEFA Champions League which is something I'm extremely excited about. It feels like we've been missing from the tournament for far too long and it will be great to see those special European nights back again.

On a personal note I'm hopeful of fighting again in December. My hand injury has been improving and I think I may be able to get back in the ring again before the end of the year.

That will set me up nicely going into 2015. Next year I'm hopefully going to have some big opponents and be back involved in the big fights. I'll be aiming to come back to the Echo Arena and bring heavyweight boxing back to the city.

I'll be doing all I can do to prove to everyone that I can get to where they thought I was heading despite the setbacks I've had. I still think I can get there and I'm doing everything I can to make sure I do.

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